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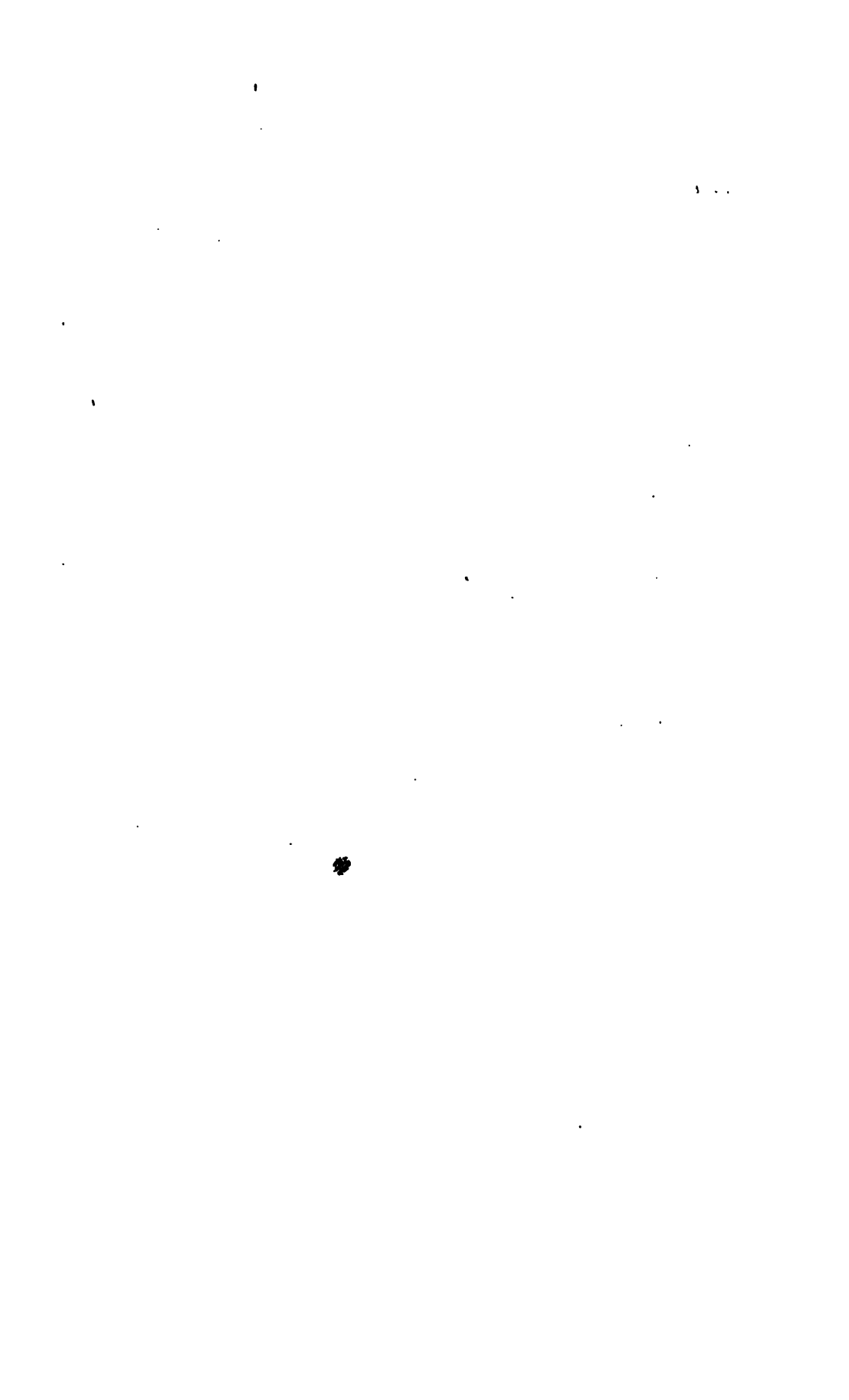
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A Novel.

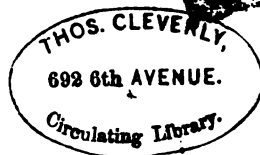
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Die angeborenen Bande knüpfe est,
An's Vaterland, an's theure, schliess' dich an,
Das halte fest mit deinem ganzen Herzen!
Hier sind die starken Wurzeln deiner Kraft;
Dort in der fremden Welt stehst du allein,
Ein schwankes Rohr das jeder Sturm zerknickt.

SCHILLER.



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RAYMOND'S HEROINE.

CHAPTER I.

BLACK MOOR FARM.

A GABLE-ROOFED, lattice-windowed house, small and antique, but not the less solid and comfortable, flanked by a laborer's cottage on one side and by a range of diminutive outhouses on the other, with a tiny flower garden in front and a dark green background of trees rising up behind—such was Black Moor Farm five-and-twenty years ago.

A smiling place enough in itself, but unfortunate in the prospect it overlooked. For the gate at the end of the pretty flower garden opened on a flat, dreary expanse of moorland, which only a scanty covering of grass and a few clumps of furze bushes redeemed from utter sterility. This was the Black Moor, thus styled from that peculiar darkness of soil which tells its tale so plainly to those who have traveled through the coal districts of the North of England. A sullen, desolate waste this same Black Moor was—a place where Nature seemed to be in perpetual mourning over the buried fertility of a ruined world. In its black eerie barrenness the plain appeared wider than it was; in reality not much more than a mile and a half can have intervened between the farm and a straggling row of deserted, half ruined looking cottages, which skirted the opposite or north side of the moor, and behind which rose a long low line of hills shutting in the horizon.

For any one versed in the local annals, the grimness of the scene was increased tenfold by the sight of those tenantless dwellings with their smokeless chimneys and broken windows. The Black Moor has a tragic history, and yonder empty cottages, while they stood, were ghastly mementoes of it. A coal-pit was worked here once, and those said cottages, built for the occupation of the pitmen, promised to become the nucleus of a large village, possibly of a prosperous town. But one day the miners were surprised at their work by a sudden blast of fire; some scores of men who had seen the sun shining on the Black Moor that morning saw its light no more, and the cottages were left untenanted save by weeping widows and orphans, who in a few weeks were dispersed to the four winds to seek what lot might await them in the absence of their bread-winners. The abandoned homesteads were never occupied again, the damage caused by the accident being so expensive that the works were not reopened; and the embryo village—already ambitiously dubbed North Hollsworth, after the flourishing little

township of Hollsworth on the southern side of the moor—gradually fell into ruins.

Only one dwelling continued to be inhabited—a miserable ale-house, still retaining the sign of "The Black Man," which it had assumed in compliment to its original patrons. The landlord was an old man and averse to moving; and though of regular customers he had now few or none, a road ran by his door along which on market-days a sufficient number of thirsty drovers journeyed to make it just worth his while to keep his house open.

The road in question skirted the northern and western sides of the moor, joining the London road near the southwest corner, not far from the place where, in hideous blackness, yawned the entrance of the disused coal-pit. As may be imagined, this spot in particular was, held in evil repute by the country folk of the neighborhood, the pit-hole being known to them by the ill-omened name of the 'Devil's Coal-cellar.' The uninhabited cottages looming on the northern horizon, spectral looking as they were, seemed less dreary to behold than the black abyss down which human beings had descended to meet a dark, horrible death in the hidden recesses of the earth. Even grown men, finding themselves near the Devil's Coal-Cellar after nightfall, were apt to pass with bated breath and accelerated pace; while, as for the children of the district, it was very rare that they ventured near the place at all save in large bands and in broad daylight. And, so far at least as the children were concerned, the superstition which taught them to eschew the spot was a very wholesome one, since a new accident might easily have happened there. The rough fence erected round the mine when the works were closed had been gradually broken down by time and weather, and had not been replaced, so that the mothers of the neighborhood were not unnaturally wont to view the hole as a kind of ogre's trap or pitfall set expressly for the ensnarement of their darlings. However, whether by force of instinct or parental warning, the dreaded catastrophe did not occur, and, no steed having been stolen, the stable door continued unlocked as before.

It was about three quarters of a mile from this inauspicious southwest corner that the Farm was situated, on the south side of the moor, and directly facing the deserted hamlet of North Hollsworth. Half a mile or so farther on, still following the southern border of the waste, one came upon the village of Hollsworth proper, a snug, pleasant little place, peeping out from a bushy green wood, in which it seemed

to be half imbedded. It was strange indeed to see how richly this cold, desolate Black Moor was fringed with verdure along the whole of its southern boundary—a juxtaposition of contrasted barrenness and fertility only to be accounted for by a similarly abrupt diversity of geological formation. Thus Black Moor Farm and the neighboring village of Hollsworth, sketched by a spectator on the moor, would have made as pleasing a picture as an admirer of quiet rural scenery could desire; while, on the other hand, a view taken from the front windows of the farm or village would have been pronounced, if not precisely unpicturesque, certainly not smiling or pretty.

Still, sunshine and spring weather will always go some way toward lighting up the weirdest scene; and even the view over the Black Moor might almost have been called pleasant as, on a fine evening in early spring some five-and-twenty years ago, a woman stood at the gate of the pretty flower garden in front of the farm-house, holding a little girl by the hand, while together they looked with smiling eyes over the waste. Following the direction of their gaze, there might have been descried athwart the level sunbeams two figures, a man and a child—a little girl this also—who hand in hand came toward them across the moor.

"See, Amy dear," said the woman, "there are father and Minnie coming back at last. Poor child! I hope the walk hasn't been too much for her, but I could not keep her at home when she begged so."

"Amy wanted to go too," reproachfully pouted the little one, a tiny, brown-haired, brown-eyed thing some four years old. "But mother wouldn't let Amy go—not even when father said please."

"Because Amy isn't big enough to have her own way in every thing—not even when father says please," returned the mother fondly, stooping down to stop the child's mouth with a kiss. "Wait till you are as old as Minnie, and you shall get long enough walks then. There, run and ask Minnie how she liked it."

She held open the gate for the child, who ran out eagerly toward the new comers, and in half a minute more was lifted high from the ground to receive a big kiss from father. Another minute, and the three—father and daughters—had reached the gate where the mother stood with beaming eyes waiting to welcome them.

"Well, John dear, so you are back at last! I hope you have not quite knocked up my little Minnie."

"No he hasn't," said Minnie stoutly; "I'm never tired when I'm with father. I am sure Amy would have been, though, wouldn't she, father? It was such a very long way, you know, and Amy is so little."

And Minnie tossed a graceful little head over which six winters had barely passed.

Her father looked at her proudly, and began twisting a rich golden curl round one of his large sunburnt fingers.

"Did you ever see such a puss as it is!" he chuckled exultingly. "Why, we've walked six mile if we've walked a step, and yet the monkey won't cry tired, nor wouldn't if it was twice as far. Any thing to be with father, hey, lass? I carried her a bit at times, so you needn't look so scared, Polly," he added suddenly, answering

a surprised glance from his wife. "Lord bless you, you needn't be afraid of my forgetting what the little legs are made of."

"I am not afraid of your forgetting any thing where the children are concerned, or I either," replied the wife, smiling up fondly into his face. "You are a good father and a good husband, John, if ever there was one."

"I'm glad you think so, Polly, I'm glad you think so. I try to be, God knows—and with such a wife and such children as I've got, it would be hard if I didn't succeed. But take us inside, my girl, and let us have our tea. Minnie and I are starving, pretty near, ain't we, little 'un?"

He drew his wife's arm within his own, and went with her toward the house, the two children bounding before them.

They were a good-looking couple, this husband and wife—he with his manly bronzed features and powerfully framed figure, she with her gentle face and graceful feminine bearing. And yet, good-looking as they were, and happy as they seemed together, a superficial observer, unaware of the perfect love which united them and smoothed down all apparent disparities, would scarcely have pronounced them a well-assorted pair. There was a refinement about the wife, both in manner and appearance, which was wanting to the husband, who—partly because he could not help it, partly from mere carelessness and defiance of the world's opinion—looked and spoke a great deal more like the rough honest-hearted yeoman that he was than like the polished gentleman that he was not.

So far it might be said that the marriage on the part of the wife was a *méalliance*; and indeed the same had been said pretty loudly by her friends at the time it was contracted. Not that she had come of a stock much superior to his own, but her father had made a fortune in business of which she inherited her due share; and John Haroldson when she married him was only a farmer's son, with few worldly possessions save a handsome honest face, a warm heart, and a quick temper. The last of these speedily brought him into trouble with his wife's only surviving relations, a brother and sister, who, never disposed to look on him with favor, soon found, or said they found, that there was no getting on with him. He would not brook being advised by them, and they could not, or would not, keep their advice to themselves; so, as Mrs. Haroldson always took part stoutly with her husband, all communication between her and her family had been given up for years. The brother, with his ample inheritance, had betaken himself to Australia, where he was reported to be amassing a large fortune. The sister had married a wealthy merchant of St. Austin's, a large northern sea-port from which Hollsworth is not more than twenty miles distant; but in spite of their comparative proximity, the two sisters, Mrs. Fanshawe and Mrs. Haroldson, lived as estranged as though half the globe had separated them.

Perhaps John Haroldson's shortcomings might have been looked upon by his wife's relations with more lenient eye if he had succeeded better than he did in worldly matters. But somehow he was not cut out to be a prosperous man. After his marriage he made an attempt

establish himself in business, but fortune, or perhaps his own idiosyncrasies, declared against his success; and when the greater part of his and his wife's joint possessions had been thrown away in the vain endeavor to gain a footing in the commercial world, he gave up the task in disgust, resolving to return to his original and more congenial vocation of farming. It was at this time that Mr. and Mrs. Haroldson settled at Black Moor Farm, which, though very small and yielding proportionately diminutive profits, suited them better than a larger place would have done, especially as their income was eked out by a yearly sum arising from the remains of their former property invested at a high rate of interest in a local joint-stock company. Here their two children were born, and here, in spite of comparative poverty and almost total seclusion from the world, the happiest years of their lives were spent.

The family had now entered the house, and were assembled in the spacious front kitchen which, save on specially festive occasions, was their ordinary sitting-room, and which looked so comfortable with its sanded floor and raftered roof as fully to justify their preference.

"Let me see, this is Captain Pullyn's night," said Mrs. Haroldson, as she applied her hand to the task of tea-making. "I always have a low three extra spoonfuls at least when he's coming."

"I forgot to tell you—you need not make tea for him this evening, Polly," said the farmer, looking up from the corner where he was sitting with a little daughter on each knee. "I met him this morning, and he was going to St. Austin's for the day, and won't be back till dark. He'll look in then if he has time."

Captain Pullyn was a retired master in the merchant service living at Hollsworth, and in spite—or, as the village gossips said, because—of sundry eccentricities, was the only person in the neighborhood on any thing like intimate terms at the farm, where he regularly spent two evenings of each week.

"And what have you and Minnie been doing all this time, John?" asked the wife, as she set a chair for her husband at the tea-table. "You have not told us a word yet of your adventures."

"Well, there isn't much to tell, is there, Minnie? Except that the folks at Stockdale Farm seemed very glad to see us, and set down Minnie to a famous feast of roasted apples while I went to look at the beasts. And regular beauties they were, Polly, and no mistake."

"Oh, yes! beauties," said Minnie, looking up from a basinful of bread and milk. "And white sugar to eat them with, that you sprinkled on them with a spoon pricked all over holes, just like our pepper-caster. Wasn't it funny?"

"You little goose, I wasn't thinking of your apples. It was the beasts I meant, Polly, the finest lot you ever saw, and safe to be worth two hundred pounds next year if they're worth a farthing, or two hundred and fifty more likely—put it down at two hundred and fifty. So I've made up my mind to bid as high as a hundred for them (we can stand that, you know), and if we get 'em—as we are pretty sure to, for there ain't any body likely to give as much—that will make a hundred and fifty clear profit, do you see—clear profit. And then hey for another two hun-

dred pounds in the St. Austin's Grand Consolidated General Agency Company, with a silk gown for mother and the two biggest dolls in the toy-shop window for my two little cats."

"That's me," cried Minnie, nodding her curled head rapturously—"me and Amy. But you haven't told them yet half the things we did, father. After the apples were done and father was ready, we said good-bye and went away, and presently we got into a beautiful field—oh! such a beautiful field—where there were prim-roses growing. Father set me down—I had been riding on father's back, you know—and we stopped a long while and gathered the biggest nosegay I ever saw, all for mother and Amy. They would have been so pleased with it, but I was very stupid and left it behind at the Black Man."

"The Black Man! I'm afraid you and father are not to be trusted together. What! after the roasted apples did he take you to run up a score at the Black Man?"

"And I shan't take her there again in a hurry," said the farmer. "They are a deal too high and mighty for my custom, to say nothing of having to wait a quarter of an hour before you can get what you want. I wouldn't have gone there, only Minnie was thirsty and wanted a drop of water, but I little knew the fuss we should have to get it."

"Indeed, how was that?" asked his wife.

"Why, when we got to the place, after going well nigh ten minutes out of our way for it, there didn't seem to be a soul about. We went into the bar-room, and there was nobody there, and then into the kitchen, and there was nobody there, and after that we got poking into the very stable-yard, and there was nobody there either."

"Except a horse," chimed in Minnie. "We heard him neighing, and father lifted me up to peep at him through a hole in the stable door. A pretty gray horse he was, and turned round his head quite pleased when I called to him. Wasn't he a nice old fellow, father?"

"Yes, I don't expect it's often there is a bit of horseflesh like that at the Black Man," said the farmer. "Well, as I was telling you, I suppose they heard our voices at last, for presently Mrs. Underwood puts her head out of an up-stairs window and calls out to know what we were doing in her yard, as cross as if we were thieves. So I told her what we wanted, and when she found it was me, she seemed to get a trifle more civil, and came down with a glass of water for the child, and I had a drop of beer for the good of the house. I said we had had hard work to get any body to hear us, and she answered, in her sulky kind of way, that she was up stairs giving her husband his dinner, and that the stable-boy had gone home for a couple of days for a holiday—nothing for him to do, she said. And they don't take the way to get much to do, either, if they don't treat their customers better than they've done to-day."

"It isn't poor old Reuben's fault," said Mrs. Haroldson apologetically. "He was always civil and obliging as long as he was able to look after things himself."

"No, it isn't poor Reuben's fault, except that he was a fool at his time of life, with one foot in the grave as you may say, to go and marry a young wife for no reason at all."

she had got a handsome face. Any one with half an eye might have known it wouldn't turn out well."

"It was very foolish of him, of course, but, John, we have no reason yet to say that it has turned out ill."

"Haven't we though? Look at her eye the next time you see her, and say if you think she has got the kind of temper to be happy sitting at home nursing an old bedridden husband. No, it would have been a deal better for her, and him too, if she had stopped behind the tobacconist's counter at St. Austin's till she got somebody of her own age to make up to her. And it would have happened some day, I don't doubt; she was a handsome girl in spite of her black looks, and there are young fools in the world as well as old ones."

"She was very handsome, certainly, and is still. And she is quite aware of it, I fancy."

"You are about right there, Polly. Her head was turned with admiration long before she married old Reuben; he would never have had a chance of her but that she knew he had a trifle of money laid by, and thought may be it was more than it is. No wonder she finds the change dull when it was only last year she had half the young men of St. Austin's coming every day to look at her."

"No wonder indeed. Poor foolish old Reuben!"

"Ay, and married ones too, if all tales are true. Why, it was even said that Mr. Lee . . . No, that I believe that part of it, you know—a practical steady-going man of business like him don't run off the course in that manner. Look here, Polly, isn't it time these young 'uns were in bed? They have had their supper, and here is Miss Amy nodding her head off already. And Miss Minnie is beginning to keep her company, I think."

"I ain't," said Minnie indignantly. "Oh! do say I may stay up a little tiny bit longer, father—just till the candles come in. I'm bigger than Amy, you know."

"So she is," said the farmer, looking appealingly at his wife, who stood near ready to carry off both the children for execution. "Yes, let her stay till the candles come in—it won't be long first—poor little pussy."

Minnie rubbed her cheek gratefully on her father's rough hand as it lay on the table, and he smiled delightedly, as though well satisfied at having earned such a reward. She was his eldest-born, this pretty golden-haired little fairy, and it was tacitly understood in the household that if there was any inequality in the love which John Haroldson lavished on both his children, the scale inclined in Minnie's favor.

Amy was roused with some difficulty, and her fat little cheeks having received one pair of reverberating kisses from her father and another from Minnie, she was on the point of being led off to her solitary bed, when a ring at the door-bell sounded the signal of a respite.

"The captain, as sure as a gun," cried the farmer, striking his hand on the table. "Run, children, see who will get the door open first."

Amy was wide awake now, and bounded after her sister toward the door, both children animated by a manifest zeal which sufficiently proved that the captain had his good qualities.

The dusk was gathering fast, but there was still light enough for the children to recognize their old friend.

"Cap'en, cap'en," cried little Amy, "come into the kitchen, cap'en, and tell mother Amy mustn't go to bed. Amy isn't sleepy now."

"What do you think, captain," said Minnie, "I have just been walking six miles. All the way to Stockdale Farm and back. Isn't it famous?"

But the captain did not answer, and walked straight into the kitchen without a word.

Mr. Haroldson came forward to welcome him, but even then the visitor only gave a slight mechanical salutation, and, making for his accustomed place in the chimney-corner, seated himself, still in silence.

"Hollo, what's up now?" said the farmer. "Polly, make haste and light a candle—the captain can't see to shake hands."

The joke did not take, for the captain remained silent some moments longer, while Mrs. Haroldson fumbled on the chimney-piece to find the matches. At last he spoke, but even the children started as they heard his voice—it was so unlike the familiar one they were used to.

"I have just come from St. Austin's. You have heard the news yet, I suppose?" "No," said the farmer. "What kind of news?"

"Bad. Lord help us all, very bad. Walter Lee has gone off, and carried all the ready money of the Grand Consolidated along with him. He must have been tampering with the funds for a long time back, they say. Nobody seems to know the rights of it exactly, but it comes out pretty plain that the Company's shares ain't worth the paper they're printed on."

The light of the newly-lit candle, falling on John Haroldson's face, showed the features pale and rigid as though they had been hewn out of marble.

"Then I am a ruined man," he articulated hoarsely, and, suddenly tottering, he fell back on the chair from which he had risen to greet the captain, and buried his face in his hands with the quick spasmodic movement of a strong man in his agony.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAPPLE-GRAY.

For two or three minutes there was a stillness as of death among the little group.

Mrs. Haroldson, pale and trembling, sat looking at her husband without strength to speak to him a word of comfort; and the two little girls, vaguely understanding that a great calamity had fallen upon the household, crept up to her side in mute awe-struck wonderment. At last the captain broke silence.

"Come, mate," he said kindly, clapping his broad palm on Haroldson's shoulder, "you mustn't take on like this. Think of your wife and children, and bear up for their sakes if you can't for your own."

A convulsive quiver shook the farmer's burly frame from head to foot; it was precisely because he did think of his wife and children that the blow had fallen upon him so heavily.

"Yes, yes, it's very hard, I know, but . . ."

must keep your colors flying for all that. Only look what a young man you are compared to me, and every penny I've got, pretty nigh, is gone the same way. Little I thought ever to go afloat again, I promise you, but I must now. And there's my boy Joe, whom I'd set my heart on bringing up for a gentleman and a scholar—and he's got the stuff for it in him if ever a little chap had—he must go to a cheaper school now, or p'raps none at all. It's a bad job, for the masters are so pleased with him, and eleven's just the age when a boy takes in most. But I keep up my spirits, bless you, I keep up my spirits—there's something tells me Joe will make port yet."

And the captain gave vent to a sound that was intended for a great cheery guffaw, but which a curious obstruction in his throat turned into something not unlike a sob.

"We ain't the only ones, nor yet the worst off," he went on after a pause. "I'm sorry for Mrs. Haroldson there, but how would she like to change with poor Mrs. Lee, who has been lying all day half dead, moaning and groaning after the rascally scoundrelly villain that has deserted her? And there's poor young Raymond Lee, the son, reading for honors at Oxford, where I'd meant to send Joe too when the ~~time~~ came—how would you like to be him when he hears that his father is a blackguard and a thief, whom the gallows would be too good for? A fine young fellow he is as ever stepped: I always took to him from the time he had that stand-up fight at school three years ago for little Joe. It isn't every big boy ready to leave school who would trouble himself about a little 'un just come in; but there were a couple of great hulking chaps trying to put upon Joe and chaffing him because, mayhap, his father wasn't such a fine gentleman as theirs, and young Lee told them to have done, and they wouldn't, and with that he fought them and gave them such a devil of a thrashing as I'll be bound their timbers show the marks of to this day. A fine fellow—a magnificent fellow. And to think of him having such a father!"

Haroldson made a movement of impatience; wrath at last supplied him with speech.

"Curse the father and the son too!" he burst out. "Curse them—curse them ten times over for what they have made me and mine suffer."

"This won't do, mate, 'pon my word it won't do. Better leave the cursing alone altogether in my opinion, but anyhow you musn't mix up the innocent and the guilty. Come, come, things are bad enough without making 'em worse, and if you work yourself into a passion like this you'll break your poor wife's heart, and you know you will."

The argument thus used, and perhaps a certain accent of authority audible in the captain's voice, did not pass without effect. Haroldson seemed to make a violent effort at self-control, and, having muttered a few words fiercely to himself, relapsed into silence. Presently, with a new effort, he spoke again—this time in tones weak and husky, but constrainedly calm.

You have told me nothing yet. How did it happen? Why didn't they stop him?"

I suppose because he was too sharp for them, coundrel. It seems, though, the directors *been getting a little suspicious lately*; but

instead of grappling him at once, they fussed and palavered, and talked about getting an assistant-secretary to help him with his work, and in one way or another gave him time to get frightened. Well, things went on so a good while, and at last an assistant-secretary was engaged, and was to come into the office this very day, and there was to be a meeting of the Board, and a grand overhauling of the books, and I don't know what. It was all very clearly arranged, I dare say, but you see Lee was one too many for them, and when the office was opened this morning he never showed face in it. They sent to his house three mile out of town to see what the matter was, and found Mrs. Lee in a terrible state, for he had gone out the evening before to visit a friend and hadn't been home since; she was afraid some harm had come to him—though, poor soul, she didn't guess what. They searched and searched, but couldn't get to hear any thing of him, and at last somebody thought of breaking open the desk where he kept his papers. And sure enough the first thing they found was a letter directed to Mrs. Lee, bidding her good-bye before he was off across the sea, and begging her to forgive him, for the devil had got hold of him and he couldn't help himself. With that poor Mrs. Lee fainted right off, and has never properly come to herself since, and the Company's people went back to the office to see after the books and the strong-box. They were not long of finding out then that he had gone off with every thing that could be taken, and had been cheating them with false accounts for years back into the bargain. The Grand Consolidated has been a humbug all along, but there is one person will have made a good thing out of it, and that's Walter Lee."

"He shan't," cried Haroldson fiercely, while his face, so pale a minute before, suddenly flushed purple with passion. "Who is he that he is not to be caught and punished like other robbers? It will be easy enough to lay hands on him; he can't be far off yet."

"I don't know about that—it is just the contrary, I'm afraid. A vessel put out of St. Austin's this morning for Rotterdam, and it's as certain well-nigh as any thing can be that Walter Lee was aboard of her."

The farmer's countenance fell, and for a moment he was silent. Presently he seemed to recover himself, and shouted vehemently:

"I don't believe a word of it. What! do you mean to tell me that the people at the harbor, where he is so well known, would be such fools as to let him go out of the country without scenting something wrong, or do you think for that matter he would be such a fool as to make the venture? He would try every port in England before St. Austin's, I can tell you."

"So I should have said too," answered the captain, "but it seems pretty plain he thought different. We can't make out yet that he was seen by any body about the harbor, that's true, but it is certain he took that way. You remember the turnpike between his house and St. Austin's? Well, the pikeman swears to seeing him pass last night. He was on his dapple-gray, the same that he always rides, and even talked to the man a minute while he was waiting for his change. So there can be no mistake, you see."

For a few seconds Haroldson did not answer.

He had started violently while the captain was speaking, and now he seemed buried in earnest perplexed meditation, as one who strives to arrange his ideas after a great shock. At last he lifted his head, and said, slowly and confidently:

"His dapple-gray, did you say? Then I can tell you what has become of Walter Lee. It was to throw us off the scent that he went through the turnpike last night; he struck off across country before he reached St. Austin's, and now he is in hiding at North Hollsworth, in the Black Man."

The captain stared as though he thought his friend had taken leave of his senses, and so indeed for a while he believed. But Haroldson persisted in his theory, endeavoring to convince his hearers by recounting the circumstances of his visit to the Black Man that day, his ungracious reception by Mrs. Underwood, and, above all, the presence of a gray horse in the usually empty stable.

"I had a feeling at the time that I had seen that horse somewhere," he concluded in rapidly increasing excitement, "fool that I was not to know it at once. But I know it now, it was Walter Lee's, and I'll swear to it among a thousand. Make haste, make haste, and we'll run the villain to earth yet."

The captain still looked incredulous.

"It isn't likely the horse is the same," he said, shaking his head. "You've made a mistake in your reckoning, mate, depend upon it."

"No, no, I have made no mistake," panted Haroldson. "Make haste, come with me to North Hollsworth, and you shall see. 'Sdeath, will you help me, or will you not?" he added with an impatient stamp of his foot.

"I'll go with you of course if you want me to. There can be no harm in trying, though, mind you, I don't believe it's a bit of use. But stop—supposing it really is as you think, isn't it as likely as not that while we are going to look for him at the Black Man, he may be riding away from us and getting off by the London road? This is just the time for him to be getting under way again, and it isn't likely he would venture to stop another night after Mrs. Underwood caught you prowling about the stables."

The farmer looked staggered; evidently he appreciated the force of his shrewd old friend's argument.

"Yes, yes, you are right—quite right. Somebody must go and watch by the London road, of course. I'll do that part of it, and you shall go over to the Black Man. Let me see, you must go to the village first, though, and get two or three to help—he's not a man to let himself be taken without a fight for it."

"You are not far out there, mate. But how are you going to manage about yourself? It ain't any safer for you than for me to tackle him alone, and, what's more, you shan't try."

Haroldson laughed savagely.

"You don't know me, or you'd know I'm a match for twenty such as he when my blood's up. No, no, don't you be frightened, Polly," he added, as he felt his wife's hand laid imploringly on his arm, "I'll get one of the Dobsons to go with me, or both if you like it better. I shall be safe enough, never fear."

The Dobsons were two laborers, father and son, who lived in the cottage adjoining, and who,

except during harvest-time, sufficed for the work of the farm. These, and old Mrs. Dobson who lived with them, were the only neighbors the Haroldsons had nearer than Hollsworth, half a mile distant.

"You will be sure to take them, John, won't you? Oh! promise me you will not go without them, dear John."

"Yes, yes, I promise, keep your mind easy, Polly. Now then, let's be off if we don't want to find he has slipped through our fingers. Stop, though, I mustn't forget this."

He stepped to the fireside, and took down an old fowling-piece from its place over the high mantel-shelf.

"No, John, no, for Heaven's sake no," entreated his wife, while once more he felt her fingers clasping his arm. "Put it back, dear, if you love me, do. There is no saying what may happen; you are not yourself this evening, and" . . .

"Do you think I'm a baby, that I'm not to be trusted with a gun? And if I were, there will be the two men to look after me, won't there? Don't be a fool, Polly—he don't go out to-night without fire-arms, and I don't see why I should either."

"Don't go at all, dear, that will be the best. John, John, if you have any pity, stop at home with me and the children."

"What! and let that damned villain get clear off to live in clover on my money! Do you take me for an idiot? Captain, what are you waiting for? Do you your duty, and I'll do mine."

He shook off the loving pressure by which his arm was still retained, and, gun in hand, strode into the night air. In a moment afterward the captain followed, having remained behind to whisper—

"Don't you be frightened, Mrs. Haroldson. It's ten to one the scoundrel is half way across to Holland by this time."

And with that the old seaman hurried out after his friend.

"You quite understand," said Haroldson, who waited for him impatiently outside the threshold. "You are to get together a party in the village and go across with them to search the Black Man. As for the London road, I'll take care he don't escape that way."

There was something in the accent with which the last words were spoken that seemed to rouse the captain's misgivings.

"You will get the Dobsons to go with you, won't you?" he said, earnestly. "You must not break your promise to poor Mrs. Haroldson, you know."

"Who talks of breaking promises?" replied Haroldson, testily. "Of course I'll get the men to go with me, and ten men if I could. Now, if you are to do any good to-night, be off."

The two separated without more words, the captain setting off at a brisk pace in the direction of the village, while Haroldson went toward the little cottage which stood a few yards distant from his own dwelling. He tapped hastily at the door, which was presently opened by an old woman, holding a light high above her head to discover who the unwonted visitor might be.

"Tell Tom and Ned to come out to me at once. And hark'ee, let them bring two stout cudgels with them."

"My heart alive, who'd have thought of its be-

"*ing* the master! Tom and Ned will be mortal sorry, sir, but it happens as how they are up at the village to-night, spending the evening at the Goat and Compasses. How contrary things do fall out, to be sure! Nothing wrong, I hope, sir?"

"No, no, nothing at all. Good-night."

"I'll run and fetch 'em, if so be as you wish it, sir."

"I have no time to wait. I am in a hurry."

He turned abruptly on his heel, and immediately afterward had disappeared in the darkness, leaving Mrs. Dobson to direct a bewildered stare into vacancy, and then to close the door with a perplexed shake of the head.

When John Haroldson found himself alone, he paused for a moment and looked back to the place where a glow of mingle firelight and candlelight shining through a still unshuttered window marked the position of his own house. Perhaps in that moment he was thinking of his promise to his wife; but if he was, the hesitation it caused him did not last long, for in the next he had turned his back on the light, and was striding rapidly toward the spot where, at the southwest corner of the moor, the cart-track from North Hollsworth joined the London road.

The night sky was dark and stormy, and since sunset a high wind had sprung up which sighed and whistled about his ears with a wail almost human. But he heeded it not, and held his way steadily on, his fingers tightening themselves with feverish tenacity round the stock of his gun.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEVIL'S COAL-CELLAR.

CAPTAIN PULLYN was not a man to let grass grow under his heels, but on arriving at Hollsworth it necessarily took him some time to obtain the assistance without which his contemplated visit to the Black Man would have been alike useless and foolhardy. Thus, with his utmost dispatch, it must have been something like an hour from the time of his leaving the farm before he and a hastily organized party of some three or four stalwart villagers presented themselves at the door of the forlorn ale-house on the opposite side of the moor. Here the captain's doubts as to the correctness of Haroldson's theory were speedily strengthened, the landlord's handsome young wife assuring them that nobody was in the house save herself and her bedridden husband.

"If you doubt my word, you may come and look for yourselves," she added, with a defiant toss of her dark tresses. "It shan't be said I was afraid of your coming across any thing wrong in my house. But you will be disappointed, that's all I have got to tell you."

The captain decided on entering nevertheless, and the party went into the bar-room, and thence into the kitchen. In the latter place the remains of supper stood on the table—an unusually choice one probably, judging from the chicken bones with which two plates were strewn, and a small quantity of mulled wine left still steaming in one of two tumblers.

"Ha! so you have just had a guest at supper," said the captain, knitting his brow while he

scanned the landlady's face. "And have given him a good one too, or I am mistaken."

She answered his frown with another, only a great deal darker.

"I suppose I and my husband are at liberty to have what we like for supper," she answered haughtily. "This is my plate, and that is his, which I have just brought down from his bedroom. As for guests, we have not had one near us since last market-day."

"That is strange, for Farmer Haroldson tells me he saw a splendid dapple-gray in your stable to-day. He thought he knew it, but of course that must have been his fancy."

He was looking at her narrowly as he spoke, and thought he detected a slight change of color at the words. But it was difficult to decide whether it arose from the consciousness of guilt, or from simple anger at his inquisition.

"He may have known it fifty times over for what I can tell. I didn't, that's all. A stranger brought it this morning, asking me to keep it till the evening, and half an hour ago he came and fetched it again. That's the way he took, if you want to follow him."

She pointed in the direction precisely opposite to that in which lay the London road.

"Very obliging of you to volunteer the information, I'm sure," said the captain dryly. "You are quite certain, I suppose, that the horse and his master are really gone?"

"As you seem to doubt, you had better make sure for yourself. You are welcome to search the stable and the house too."

"Well, it will be a satisfaction to us, Mrs. Underwood, I don't deny."

She waved her hand imperiously toward the door leading into the stable-yard. Thither the captain and his companions went, but a very slight examination sufficed to show them that the horse seen by Haroldson in the afternoon was no longer there. Nor was a subsequent search for the creature's master any more successful. As Mrs. Underwood had told them, nobody was in the house but herself and her husband—the latter too old and infirm even to comprehend the questions which Captain Pullyn did not fail to put to him. Thus, after a long search—useless except to convince them that no Walter Lee was then in hiding in or near the Black Man—the visitors took leave, making the best apology they could to Mrs. Underwood, who received it, as might have been expected, sullenly and ungraciously.

"Who will come with me to the London road?" asked the captain as soon as he and his comrades found themselves once more under the night sky. "I shan't be satisfied till I have heard what Haroldson has been doing all this time. Not that I exactly believe in the poor fellow's fancy, you know; but if any thing could persuade me he was right, it would be that woman's manner. It ain't natural, my boys, and I don't like it."

Partly out of a real wish to be of service, partly out of curiosity and love of excitement, all signified their willingness to see the adventure to a conclusion; and, striking across the plain in a southwesterly direction, the party set out for their night walk over the Black Moor.

A wild rough walk it was for a stormy night—over uneven ground where ever and anon large

bristling clumps of furze presented themselves, not always easy to avoid stumbling against in the darkness. There might have been some danger of the captain and his companions losing their way, but that it was from time to time shown them by the light of the moon, which had now risen, and every now and then was to be seen through an occasional rent in the dark masses of cloud that careered over the sky. The wind was still very high, and howled about the ears of the wayfarers with grotesque variety of note—sometimes as though endeavoring fantastically to imitate the cry of a living thing in pain. They pushed on resolutely, however, in spite of the difficulties of the way, only at last slackening their pace when the foremost of the party turned round to say warningly:

"For the Lord's sake look well to your footing. We are close on the Devil's Coal-Cellar here—I know it by these bushes."

"So we are," said another, stopping to look round him. "Well, it's an ugly place to be near, especially on a night like this. Save us! what a noise the wind makes!"

"The wind—or something else," said the first, with a shudder. "For my part, I'm never this way but I fancy I hear some queer noise or other. Lord be good to us, what was that?"

"A kind of sob or groan, wasn't it?" tremulously whispered his comrade. "And right aneath our feet it sounded, too. But somehow it wasn't like a man's voice altogether."

"A man! who said it was a man? A man at the bottom of the Devil's Coal-Cellar! No, it was no man—no man of flesh and blood like you and me, that is."

"What confounded nonsense are you two lubbers jabbering about?" testily interposed the captain. "Did you never hear the wind howl before, that you hold such a parley over it? Lead on, and don't make jackasses of yourselves."

The party proceeded a few paces, and then came to a halt again.

They had passed the bushes which an instant ago had concealed from them the mouth of the pit, and now found themselves skirting its very brink. Instinctively they paused on their way to look and listen, unconsciously fascinated by the sinister horror of the time and the place. At this moment the moon was completely hidden, and the abyss at their feet was to be divined rather than seen—its locality being marked only by a blackness more intense than that prevailing elsewhere, and its limits defined by the dark outline of the bushes which here and there had sprung up on its opposite margin. But for a spectator who knew what lay between him and those bushes, the mystery which night hung over the spot rendered it not the less grim and gruesome.

"It must have been the wind," whispered one of the two men who had spoken before. "All's quiet enough now, anyhow."

"Of course it was the wind," said the captain, gruffly; "who thought it was any thing else? Now get on, boys—we shall be within hail of the road in another minute."

They walked on, soon leaving the pit-hole behind them, and presently a flood of moonlight bursting from behind a black cloud showed them, not fifty yards in front, the sign-post marking the spot where the London road touched the corner

of the moor. This was the place where Haroldson was to have kept watch, but, to the captain's surprise, it appeared entirely deserted.

"It's an odd thing," he said, as he quickened his pace. "I made sure he would have waited till he heard what we had been doing."

Just then one of the party, happening to turn his head, uttered an exclamation of surprise which arrested the captain in his course.

"There's somebody standing up near the pit-hole, sir. What do you think it can be?"

All looked round. A figure, distinctly visible in the moonlight, stood at the mouth of the pit, bending downward, almost as though seeking to explore the depths below.

The captain shouted a stentorian "Ahoy;" the figure raised its head with a sudden start, looking round in seeming bewilderment; then, on a second summons, came away from the pit-hole and began slowly to approach. As it drew near, the captain, with a sense of relief which he would hardly have cared to admit, recognized the athletic form of his friend Haroldson.

"Why the devil couldn't you say it was you at once?" he asked rather roughly. "I declare I didn't know what to think. Well, you have had no luck, I suppose, any more than we have? There's nobody been by your way, eh?"

The farmer shook his head slowly; then, opening his mouth with an apparent effort, brought out the word:

"Nobody."

His voice sounded so hoarse and tremulous that the captain could not repress a feeling of anxiety on his behalf.

"Cheer up, old friend, what's the good of crying over spilt milk? Here's what comes of being alone, you see—you've been moping yourself into the disms, and there has been nobody to talk you out of them. Why didn't you take the Dobsons with you?"

"It was not my fault—I tried to get them—indeed I did. God knows that every thing has been against me."

He put his hand up to his forehead with a wildness of gesture which increased the captain's solicitude.

"You mustn't take on like this about a lot of yellow metal shavings, 'pon my soul you mustn't. What's money but dross after all, as the parson says on Sundays? And as for not getting law of the fellow, there's no use in fretting about that. He's a bad 'un, and must come to a bad end, without you to help him."

"That's true," cried Haroldson eagerly, "that's true. Say that again."

"Not if you put yourself in such a heat about it. But folks like him generally get what they deserve sooner or later, if that's any comfort to you."

"And he has deserved the worst," insisted Haroldson, feverishly. "The very worst—eh?"

"Yes, yes, quite as bad as he's likely to get, at all events. But come home, and let your poor wife see you are safe—she'll care more about that than the money, whatever you do."

He laid his hand on Haroldson's arm to lead him away. All strength seemed to have departed from the farmer's vigorous frame, and he gave himself up to the captain's will with almost child-like submission.

The party now directed their steps towards

farm-house. On drawing near, they found themselves waited for by Mrs. Haroldson, who stood watching at the garden gate.

"All right," cried the captain cheerily as soon as he was near enough to be heard. "We haven't run down the villain, but we've come back to port safe and sound ourselves, and that's something to say."

She came out to meet them with hands clasped fervently in gratitude.

"Thank God for that. Oh! John, if you knew what I have been suffering since you left me! When I heard the gun, I thought I must have died."

"A gun!" cried the captain in amazement. "I heard no gun, but to be sure, I haven't been sitting quiet all evening as you have. Did you hear any thing, Jack? It must have been more your way than ours."

The farmer looked up with a vacant, bewildered expression which more than ever increased his friend's concern; then glanced toward the piece he held in his hand, as though with difficulty collecting his ideas.

"No," he answered at length. "At least—yes—that is—I think I heard something in the woods—a great way off. It must have been poachers."

"Ah, yes! of course," said the captain. "Pity they made Mrs. Haroldson so nervous. Hollo, mate, what's the matter?"

"I am giddy," whispered Haroldson, while he clutched his friend's arm for support. "Take me into the house."

Captain Pullyn paused an instant to dismiss his escort of villagers, who were ready enough to go home now that all chance of adventure was at an end; then, drawing the farmer's arm through his own, led him into the kitchen. Here the unfortunate man, pale and haggard, dropped into a chair, looking so much the ghost of what he had been two hours before, that both the rough seaman and the tender wife were thoroughly alarmed.

"Run and get him a drop of brandy, Mrs. Haroldson. Come, man, cheer up and look alive, if it's only for the sake of these two pretty little ones."

He pointed to Minnie and Amy, who were coming softly up to look at father, creeping along almost as timidly as if he had been a stranger. Their mother had had no heart to put them to bed during her husband's absence, and with a big picture-book spread before them they had been allowed to sit up, half dozing, in their favorite corner, whence they now emerged, looking quite cowed, as indeed they were, by the strangeness of the hour, and a vague sense of the presence of disaster.

"Come along, my hearties," said the captain coaxingly, "come and give father a kiss, and tell him he'll live to see fair weather yet."

Thus encouraged, the children approached less shyly, and Minnie was endeavoring to hoist herself up on her father's knee, when she was arrested by a sudden cry of alarm from her mother. The child's dress had caught in the lock of the gun which stood upright against John Haroldson's chair.

"The gun, the gun!" exclaimed Mrs. Haroldson, drawing away the child almost with a shriek. "For mercy's sake take care; it is loaded."

Her husband had been leaning back in his chair with closed eyes, but he opened them at this and said "No," then paused abruptly.

"Not loaded? I thought you always kept it loaded."

"Not—not this time," said the farmer faintly.

"If I had only known!" sighed Mrs. Haroldson—"how much anxiety I should have been spared to-night! Oh! John, forgive me, but I was so afraid you might do something rash—something you might spend the rest of your life in repenting."

"The brandy, for God's sake!" interposed the captain. He was standing close by Haroldson's side, and could note every change that passed over the almost ghastly countenance.

The affrighted wife rushed to the table, and seized the glass she had already filled. But ere she could raise it to her husband's lips, his head fell heavily backward, his face flushed, his teeth clenched, and he began breathing quickly and convulsively. It was evident that the case was one calling for other than ordinary household remedies, and Captain Pullyn set off at his quickest rate of speed to fetch the doctor from Hollsworth.

Before midnight John Haroldson had been carried to bed, pronounced to be suffering from a severe attack of congestion of the brain.

CHAPTER IV.

A RICH RELATION.

Two months passed away, and the farmer, though out of danger, had not yet left his sick-bed. During this time he had been ill almost to death, his life being despaired of for weeks together; and even now that he had begun to recover, he was so worn and reduced by sickness as to be for the present but the shadow of his former self.

Two terrible months these had been for Mary Haroldson, who, in addition to the overwhelming anxiety caused by her husband's illness, had been harassed by prospects of impending ruin and beggary. The accounts of the St. Austin's Grand Consolidated General Agency Company had been undergoing examination meanwhile, and matters were discovered to have been so managed that the shareholders would not only lose every shilling of their paid-up capital, but were farther liable for heavy debts contracted in their name. Unsuspected by any one but the defaulting secretary, Walter Lee, the affairs of the Company had been going wrong for years, and what wrecks of its property had survived imprudent or dishonest administration he had carried off with him in his flight. Of recovering the money thus stolen, or any portion of it, there did not now appear to be the slightest chance. In spite of the most strenuous efforts, nothing had been discovered throwing any light on the mystery which had from the first shrouded the movements of the fugitive, except indeed in so far as suspicions of Mrs. Underwood's complicity in his flight might have been confirmed by her disappearance a week or two afterward.

But in the midst of all the obscurity and confusion, one fact came out quite clearly even to the perplexed comprehension of poor care-laden

Mary Haroldson; and this was that such of the shareholders as could not afford to pay the calls made on them must be sold up and ruined, and among them the tenants of Black Moor Farm.

There was no friend near her to whom to apply for assistance in her straits. Captain Pullyn, who alone of all her neighbors would have been willing to make substantial sacrifices to befriend her and her family, was a fellow-victim with her husband in the Company's ruin, and was at this time in the thick of his own troubles. So the poor woman, with her husband lying in hourly danger of death, and an execution for debt staring her in the face, had written to the rich Mrs. Fanshawe of St. Austin's, who had no children of her own to provide for, and from whose abundance a trifle for the relief of a sister's family would never be missed.

To this appeal, wrung from the despair of a wife and mother's heart, Mrs. Fanshawe had not been altogether deaf. She had driven over from St. Austin's one day in her grand carriage, and spent nearly an hour in hearing the tale of her sister's sorrows. She had shaken her head over John Haroldson's speculative rashness, and declared that she had foreseen some such catastrophe for him all along. She had listened patiently to Mrs. Haroldson's calculations of what would suffice to save the family from absolute beggary—the advance of a couple of hundreds for the purpose of buying in the furniture and paying a year's rent on the farm; and had graciously nodded approval at the declaration that, in the event of such a loan being made, a sum should be regularly laid by each quarter for its repayment in five years at farthest. She had patted the children on the head and asked them their ages, pronouncing Amy a funny little old-fashioned thing, and professing to find in Minnie a striking resemblance to herself. She had even carried the condescension toward the latter so far as to ask the child how she would like to go and see her at St. Austin's. She had told her sister she was very sorry for her misfortunes and hoped soon to hear a better account. And finally she had discovered that there was positively not another moment to spare, and had got into her grand carriage again, leaving a five pound note behind her.

Nearly a fortnight had now passed since the rich lady's visit, and nothing more had been heard of her at the farm. In the mean time, however, Mrs. Haroldson had been relieved of her heaviest care by the decided amendment of her husband, who, as has been said, was now pronounced out of danger. But what a difference his sufferings had wrought in him!—such a difference that even the particulars of his wife's application to Mrs. Fanshawe and its results scarcely sufficed to move him to indignation. Between his illness and his misfortunes, his spirit appeared to be utterly crushed and broken; he lay in a state of chronic listlessness and dejection from which nothing had power to rouse him, save indeed sometimes the prattle of his little Minnie. For the child, so dear to him always, seemed dearer than ever now that dark days had come upon him.

One afternoon about this time Mrs. Haroldson was in her kitchen preparing her husband's dinner, and dreamily wondering how many more dinners were to be prepared for him in that fa-

miliar home where the brightest period of their lives (alas! how quickly it had retreated into the past!) had been spent.

With the gradual subsidence of her fear for her husband's safety grew stronger and stronger that other fear as to how they should bear the poverty and destitution which, as she could not forget, daily threatened them nearer. The wolf was at the door, and now that she had given up all hope of substantial aid from her sister, she saw not how he could be kept out. She thought of her children, who in happy carelessness of the future were playing beside her, and sighed heavily, when suddenly the sound of wheels drawing up in front of the house caused her to look round. And then her heart gave a bound of hope, for a stylish carriage which she recognized stood outside the garden gate, while a lady whom she knew was being helped to descend by a powdered and liveried footman.

The lady was Mrs. Fanshawe, her sister.

Mrs. Fanshawe was a tall, dignified-looking woman, a good older than her sister—she was at this time about forty years of age—with a fine figure, and a face which could still lay claim to being a handsome one. That is to say, the complexion was fresh and well preserved, and the features correctly cast after the best models, for there was not mind enough in the face to stamp it with any distinctive character of its own. As Mrs. Fanshawe had herself observed, there was a certain resemblance between herself and little Minnie Haroldson, but it was a superficial resemblance at best. Her clear blue eyes were of a paler and colder hue than those of the child, and her hair could only have been called golden by flattery, lacking as it did the rich lustre which glanced from Minnie's curls. Still there was a real likeness between aunt and niece so long as the countenance of both were in repose, but when the child smiled or grew animated it disappeared at once. And it happened very often that Minnie grew animated.

Minnie was sitting at the table snipping up pieces of old calico under the impression that she was cutting out a dress for her doll, and the visitor paused to stroke her head before taking the chair which Mrs. Haroldson hastened to bring forward.

"She looks very well to-day," said Mrs. Fanshawe admiringly. "You know me again, my dear, do you not?"

"Oh yes!" answered Minnie frankly. "You are Aunt Fanshawe, and you said that some day I was to go and see you at St. Austin's."

"Did I, my dear? Well, you will like it very much, won't you?"

"When father is better," said Minnie, nodding her head. "But father isn't well enough to take me yet."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Fanshawe dryly. She paused, and then added: "I have something to say to your mamma, my dear. Will you go and play in the next room for a few minutes, and take your sister with you?"

"Go, my darlings," said Mrs. Haroldson; and, with all the authority of her riper years, Minnie took possession of Amy, and the two marched off together.

The visitor seated herself, and then, having waited till the children had closed the door behind them, began:

"Mary, I have taken a great fancy to your eldest little girl. What do you think of my arranging to adopt her?"

The mother grew suddenly pale.

"To adopt her! To—to take her away with you, do you mean?"

"When I speak of adopting her I can mean nothing else. Of course she would live under my roof."

"No, no," cried Mrs. Haroldson hastily. "Oh! Leonora, don't be angry with me, but I could not think of parting with her for a moment. It would break my heart."

"You must consider the subject well before you decide," said Mrs. Fanshawe, not a whit discouraged. "This offer is one which will take a great burden off your hands, and" . . .

"A burden! Minnie a burden! Oh! if you knew" . . .

"What it is to be a mother," poor Mrs. Haroldson was going to add, but she checked herself in time.

"I know very well what I am saying," said Mrs. Fanshawe, with frigid stateliness. "Whatever Minnie may be to you, she is not to be maintained and educated for nothing, I suppose, any more than other children. But that is not all I was going to say. You were speaking the other day of two or three hundreds being needed to pay your rent and buy in your furniture. Now I should consider it part of the arrangement that you should have whatever you wanted for the purpose—if you agree to my proposal, that is, you understand."

Mrs. Haroldson quite understood, but she shook her head nevertheless.

"It is very kind of you, and I am very grateful," she said humbly. "But I could not part with her—indeed, indeed, I could not. It would be like selling her for gold," she added with a shudder.

Mrs. Fanshawe drew herself up stiffly.

"One would think you imagined that I wanted the child to make a slave of. I tell you that I propose to adopt her—to treat her in all respects as if she were my own; to forget in fact that she is anything else. She would be educated and brought up precisely as a daughter of my own would have been educated and brought up; she would be introduced into society when she is old enough, as Miss Fanshawe, and she would inherit all we have to leave. I have been consulting Mr. Fanshawe on the subject, and I have his entire sanction."

"In this as in all other matters," she might have added, for Mr. Fanshawe was a husband who was never known to refuse his wife anything. Not that he was particularly uxorious; but, except where the making of money was concerned, he was lazy and apathetic, and cared for nothing enough to make a fuss about it.

"If you like to throw away all these advantages for your child, of course there is nothing to be said," went on Mrs. Fanshawe, "but for my part I do not understand how you will be able to reconcile yourself to a course so culpably selfish."

A course so culpably selfish! the big words sounded very dreadful in the mother's ears. She was silent for a while; she had decided to keep her child, and was endeavoring to justify the decision to her conscience. To be accused of culpable selfishness where Minnie was concerned

was very terrible, but then the idea of parting with her was more terrible still.

Mrs. Fanshawe thought she had triumphed, and proceeded to her final stipulation.

"There is nothing in such matters like a thorough preliminary explanation," she said, coughing with an air of slight embarrassment behind her delicately-gloved hand, "and there is one more point on which I should wish to have a very clear understanding. If I consent to undertake such responsibilities toward the child, it can only be on the condition that she shall be altogether mine, and that no other influence than mine shall be brought to bear on her. I have suffered too much from your husband's rudeness and presumption not to know what it would be if he had any pretext for interfering in my domestic concerns. Therefore you will understand that, if you give up the child to me, there must be an end of all communication between her and her former home. She will be my daughter, and, as your husband's conduct has made all intercourse between his family and mine impossible, you and he must both be contented never to see her."

"Never to see Minnie! the idea is absurd—outrageous," and the mother almost laughed in the defiant bitterness of her spirit.

Mrs. Fanshawe gathered her shawl round her with a look of deeply offended dignity.

"I had hardly expected this. You write to ask me for help; and, when I come to give it you, I am told that my proposals are absurd. Well, I am glad that I have at least amused you, though I could have wished to serve you more substantially."

She was rising to go, when her sister laid a trembling hand on her sleeve.

"Leonora, dear Leonora, don't go away. I was very wrong to speak so, but I was not myself for the moment. There is nothing else in the world that I would not do to please you, only it would kill me to give up my child. You will forgive me, and help me, won't you?"

"I should be very glad to help you, Mary, but it appears you will not allow me to do so."

"Any way but that—any way but that. I could not bear it, you know, and you would not wish me to die. And there is her father too—he would never consent—I am sure he would not."

"Her father knows what he is about a great deal too well to refuse," rejoined the visitor confidently. "I have no great opinion of John Haroldson, but I do not give him credit for either such blindness or such selfishness as you seem to attribute to him. But of course if his consent is not asked it will not be given—I quite agree with you in that."

"I will ask him if you wish it," sobbed Mrs. Haroldson, terrified at her sister's offended tone. "But I know he will not consent—I am afraid it will make him ill again even to think of it."

"I am of a different opinion. However, if you do not choose to consult him, it is of no consequence—none to me at least."

In her anxiety not to alienate the only person from whom help was possible, Mrs. Haroldson made the concession which seemed to be expected of her, and undertook at once to inform her husband of the proffered terms.

"But you must not be angry if he refuses," she added tearfully as she left the room. "For he will, I know he will."

As might have been expected, Mrs. Haroldson had estimated her husband's character more correctly than her sister. When the farmer was told that Mrs. Fanshawe was willing to help him on condition of being allowed to take possession of little Minnie, he fell into such a fit of rage as made it difficult to recognize the lethargic invalid of a few moments before.

"The vile kidnapping hag!" he exclaimed passionately. "Ha! so she would take Minnie from me, would she? take away my little Minnie and never let me see her again? Say no—a thousand times no!"

John Haroldson's "No," fierce as it was, was only an echo of that already sounded in the mother's heart; but in her tender conscientiousness she felt bound to remind him of the advantages they were rejecting for the child.

"I think you are right, dear," she said falteringly. "Though we must not forget that it is an opportunity for the darling to grow up a rich and accomplished woman. It will be very different for her if she stays with us, John."

"She *shall* stay with us," thundered the father. "She is our child, and that's enough. Now go and tell the woman down stairs I said so. My little Minnie—did she want to take away my little Minnie? But she shan't—go and tell her she shan't."

"Yes, dear. You are quite right, I am sure. At least it would have broken my heart if you had decided differently."

She went down, and as gently as possible announced the failure of her mission.

"You won't be angry," she added in terror as she marked the look of stony displeasure settling on her sister's face. "Oh! Leonora, you will have pity, you will help us even though we can not give up our child. John will pay you back every farthing if he works for it night and day."

"Mr. Haroldson has not chosen to oblige me, and he can hardly expect me to oblige him."

"But, Leonora, we could not have parted with her. She is every thing to us—she and her sister."

"Indeed! Well, I can only say that I hope there are not many parents who would so selfishly prefer their own happiness to that of their daughter."

"She would not have been happy away from us," broke in Mrs. Haroldson. "You would have been very kind to her, I know, but she would have pined after us continually. The darling! she has hardly been out of our sight since she was born."

Mrs. Fanshawe had made a step toward the door, but came back at these words.

"You say it is because the child herself might be unhappy that you will not accept my offer. Very well, then I repeat it in another form. I am willing to do every thing for you and your husband that I have said, on the condition that the child shall come and stay six months in my house—with permission at the end of that time to remain or go as she pleases. All I stipulate for is that you will make no attempt to influence her choice. What do you say to that?"

But still Mrs. Haroldson shook her head.

"Don't ask me, dear Leonora, don't ask me.

She is my own little darling child, and I can not, can not part with her."

"Just as you like, of course. Only in that case pray don't try to persuade me that you are consulting her feelings in the matter rather than your own. Good-bye, Mary; I had really hoped that I might be of service to you."

"What will become of us?" sobbed Mrs. Haroldson. "Oh! Leonora, you who are so rich and so happy, won't you help us?"

"That depends altogether on yourself. My offer is still open, and if you change your mind you have only to write and tell me. Thomas, let down the steps."

She was already outside the house as she spoke, and in another minute was reclining on the luxurious cushions of her barouche and whirling rapidly away through the air.

Mrs. Haroldson remained for some time at her door, looking with tearful eyes after her sister's carriage as it bowled merrily along in the evening sunshine. But in the midst of all her causes for grief and anxiety, and in spite of the tears in her eyes, there was at her heart something not unlike a sense of joy and triumph. For had she not kept Minnie, and was she not to keep Minnie still?

She was suddenly roused from her reverie by footsteps which sounded close beside her on the gravel walk. She looked up with a start, and saw two men—attired shabbily and yet with a certain attempt at jauntiness—who, while she had been gazing into the distance, had entered the garden by the open gate, and now came to a pause within two or three paces of where she was standing.

"Sorry to disturb you, mum," said the foremost, touching his hat with awkward courtesy as her eye met his.

She was not reassured by the gesture, and started back in undefinable alarm.

"Who are you?" she asked tremulously.

"What do you want?"

"Don't you be frightened, mum, I ain't the chap, nor this gent neither, to put a lady to any unnecessary ill-convenience. But dooty is dooty, and dooty must be done. This will show you what we've come about, mum."

He held a paper before her eyes as she spoke; she glanced at it, and, comprehending all, turned very pale.

The two men were sheriff's officers.

CHAPTER V.

POVERTY, NOT WILL.

THE Haroldsons had always been respected by their neighbors, and a great deal of compassion was expressed in the village when it became known that the bailiffs were at the farm. Foremost among the sympathizers was he who had least means to help, Captain Pullyn, who came over early next morning to sit in the sick man's chamber and give him what consolation and encouragement he could. But the task was a very thankless one, for the farmer was so utterly crushed and prostrated by his misfortunes as to appear for the time incapable of receiving comfort. The good captain was almost in despair as he found how ineffectual were all his efforts

to excite even a single flash of the old hopeful energetic spirit.

"I don't see what the devil there is in it all that you should haul down your flag like this," he said, half dolefully, half angrily. "You are a young man—good twenty year younger than me, anyhow—you have your legs and arms all complete, a will to work, at least you ought to have, and a good conscience into the bargain. What more do you want to begin the world with?"

No answer, save a feverish tossing of the bed-clothes.

"Look at me," went on the captain—"Sixty year old next birthday, and all my cargo washed overboard in the same squall. But, Lord bless you, I set to work bailing the water out again, and what's happened? Why, I'm righting myself already. What do you think, I've got Brown Brothers—the great house at St. Austin's, you know—to promise to take on Joe as junior clerk from the day he's fifteen. And that ain't all, for I've lighted on a Commercial Academy for young gentlemen, highly recommended, that has agreed to do for him till then to the tune of seven pound a quarter. So with the little craft laid up safe in dock like that, there will only be a voyage or two a year for the old 'un to make, and every thing will be ship-shape again, pretty nigh. Why shouldn't it be the same with you, mate?"

The farmer sighed hopelessly.

"I'll tell you what it is," said the captain, his solicitude suggesting a new line of argument. "If you go on like this, Jack, I shall say you're a damned fool, and that's all about it."

"I dare say I am," responded Haroldson feebly. "But I can't help it."

Captain Pullyn looked at his friend, and shook his head very gravely, as a physician in presence of a particularly unfavorable symptom.

"If I only knew how to put his blood up," he muttered. "It ain't natural to see him taking things like this. A good round of stiff swearing, now, would be worth any money."

He reflected a moment, and resumed:

"I wonder what Walter Lee is doing just now. Safe in New York, perhaps, sipping sherry cobbler, bought and paid for with our money. A damned infernal rascal, eh?"

At the first mention of the name the sick man started convulsively, as one on whose newly-closed wound a rash finger has been laid. But he said nothing.

"Oh, oh! you have forgiven him, have you?" rejoined the captain tauntingly. "Any thing you would like me to say to him if I chance to come across him on the other side of the water? Your love, I suppose, and would like to know how he finds himself."

"For God's sake don't," exclaimed the farmer hoarsely, and he writhed as though under the surgeon's knife.

The captain looked at him with affected surprise.

"Don't! What do you mean? What am I not to do?"

"Don't speak to me of—of him, of that man. I have been trying all these weeks to forget him, and you will not let me."

"I don't see why you should try to forget him. There's a good reason why he shouldn't like to

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think of you, but it is a reason that only cuts one way. He has done you hundreds of pounds' worth of mischief, but you never did him a penny's worth."

Haroldson made a new movement, so violent that it seemed almost like a spasm, and turned away his face as though determined to hear no more.

"You are driving me mad," he cried tremulously. "For Heaven's sake go away and give me a little peace."

Captain Pullyn understood at last that his well-meant efforts were doing harm rather than good, and, shaking his head yet more gravely than before, reluctantly rose from the bedside and quitted the room as softly as a pair of creaking boots would allow.

He found Mrs. Haroldson in the kitchen, attempting to occupy herself with the preparation of a dinner which she knew that neither she nor her husband would have heart to touch.

The two men who since yesterday had been the virtual rulers of the household were not actually present, their duty having for the while taken them to discuss a pipe and pot of beer in the trim little parlor which had been Mrs. Haroldson's especial pride. But, to say nothing of the strong odor of tobacco which sufficiently proved that they were not far off, they had left too many traces of themselves behind to make it possible to forget what had happened. They had been taking an inventory of the kitchen furniture that morning; and the disorder of the usually neatly arranged dresser, the ink bottle with two huge quills standing upright in it, and the black stains left to dry on the carefully scrubbed deal table, remained as so many mute evidences of the fact. Then the children, silently playing at cat's cradle in a corner, had a depressed, neglected look about them which, to any one who knew them as they ordinarily were, must have suggested that their mother's mind was preoccupied by a load of unwonted care. In imitation of the bailiffs, they had been very busy that morning with pen, ink, and paper, and the consequence was that their pinafores and fingers had come off even worse than the kitchen table. But nobody had spoken of changing the pinafores or washing the fingers.

"I am sorry to see Jack so down in the mouth," said the captain, pausing to exchange a few words with Mrs. Haroldson before going out. "It's half the battle to keep up a stout heart, in my opinion."

"If it were only possible," said the poor wife, with a sigh that went straight to the captain's heart. "But it is very, very difficult."

"So it is, so it is, but you must try for all that."

"It isn't only for ourselves that I feel it," she continued, while the tears she had struggled to repress began to gather rapidly in her eyes. "But when I think of my poor innocent children . . . Oh! Captain Pullyn, how dreadful for them to be in the house while such things are going on! I feel almost as if I were doing them wrong to allow it."

"It is a pity of course, but anyhow it's no fault of yours. You mustn't fret yourself for what you can't make different."

As the captain spoke, Mrs. Haroldson did not forget that things might be made very different.

if she chose, by the simple process of writing to her sister. But she did not explain this to him, and left his assumption to go without contradiction. What was the reason for this reserve with her old friend she did not even herself suspect, yet there was a reason for it notwithstanding. It was this, that instinctively she knew the captain would vigorously condemn Mrs. Fanshawe's offer, and Mrs. Fanshawe for making it. And unconsciously to herself the unhappy mother was beginning to regard Mrs. Fanshawe's offer as a possible resource.

Captain Pullyn stood silent for a moment, looking sadly and thoughtfully at the children, then said abruptly:

"I must be going now; good-bye. And, Mrs. Haroldson, go up and sit awhile with Jack if you can. I don't think he ought to be left too much by himself, and you will understand him better than I do."

He grasped her hand warmly, and departed, leaving her to hasten up stairs to her husband's bedside.

But John Haroldson was not to be roused by the tender pleadings of his wife any more than by the rougher eloquence of the captain. In vain she forced herself to speak to him pleasantly and hopefully out of the depths of her own misery; he only shook his head and turned away in a blank dreary apathy perhaps even more painful to witness than a vehement demonstration of sorrow.

Suddenly he lifted his head from the pillow, and raised himself on one arm as though to listen. The sound of a childish sob had caught his ear, and his interest was roused at once.

"What is Minnie crying for? Is she hurt?"

Mrs. Haroldson went to the door, and saw Minnie slowly ascending the staircase, crying the while as if her heart would break.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed John Haroldson again. "What have they been doing to her?"

The child heard her father's voice, and came up with quickened pace, followed at a distance by Amy, who was considering the spectacle of her elder sister's grief with a grave and solemn interest not unminged with awe.

"My pet! what is it? Come and tell father all about it."

The assurance of her father's sympathy made Minnie roar with redoubled vigor.

"The men down stairs," she sobbed—"make them go away, father, please. They have taken away Selina's house; they say it isn't mine any more, but it is, isn't it?"

Selina was Minnie's favorite doll, and Selina's house was a red brick villa, elegantly furnished according to the most approved doll fashion, and standing almost as high as Minnie herself—the child's most costly possession.

The father's lip quivered so that he could not speak. The mother drew the child toward her and endeavored to comfort her, pressing the little head to her bosom and saying soothingly:

"Never mind, my pet, never mind. Minnie must not think of it any more."

"Make them go away," persisted Minnie. "Tell them they shan't have my things."

"My darling, I can't," said Mrs. Haroldson helplessly. "You must not mind them, Minnie dear; they have a right to be here."

"But they shan't take away Selina's house,"

panted the child. "Mother, go and tell them they shan't."

"They must do as they like, darling. Mother can't help it."

"But it is mine," protested Minnie with a new flood of tears. "Father gave it me last birthday—all for myself. Father won't let any body take it from me, will you, father?"

The father exchanged a glance of mute agony with his wife, and remained silent.

"Father would do all he could for his little Minnie," said the mother. "But he must not say any thing to those men, my pet."

Minnie twisted her little hands tightly together, with a movement of childish grief which must have been hard for any parent to witness.

"Why not? Father used not to be afraid of any body. Why not?"

"Because—because" . . . The mother paused; how was she to make the child understand the grim necessities of the law of bankruptcy? "Because what we have does not belong to us any more, but to somebody else. Because poor people can not do as they like, and we are very poor now."

"Are we? Then I want to be rich again; I won't be poor any more."

And the tiny frame became convulsed with violent, almost hysterical sobs, while the childish hands were wrung more tightly than ever.

For a minute there was silence, broken only by the child's sobs and a half-choked murmur, in which the words "Selina's house" were alone audible. The mother felt herself powerless to comfort, and stole a despairing look at her husband. He was sitting up, propping himself on his elbow while he fixed his eyes with straining intensity on the weeping child before him. On his countenance there was an expression of doubt and pain such as may be imagined on the face of a prisoner stretched on the rack to make him confess or recant. And truly John Haroldson was on the rack just now if ever man was. Presently he took his eyes off the child, and turned them on his wife, whispering:

"What if you were to write to your sister?"

"I was thinking the same thing," she answered faintly. "It seems almost wicked to let her suffer like this when it might be so different."

"Write then," said the father quickly; "write at once." And he fell back on his pillow as one who has lost all sustaining power of nerve and muscle.

The mother once more addressed herself to the task of comfort.

"Don't cry, pet, don't cry. Mother will try to make the men go away, and Minnie shan't be poor any longer. Minnie shall be rich, and have dolls bigger than Selina."

These assurances, and the soothing tone in which they were uttered, gradually had the desired effect, and in a few minutes Minnie was so far calm again as to perch herself on her father's bed with a promise to be very quiet while mother was writing.

Then Mrs. Haroldson drew forth from one of her repositories an old blotting case, and sat down to write, bending her head very low over her paper—perhaps that her husband might not see the tears that dropped on it. But the precaution was unnecessary, for he kept his eyes steadily averted, and lay with his face to the wall, caress-

ing the hand of his little Minnie, which the child had slipped into his in a mute appeal for sympathy.

About an hour after this, Captain Pullyn, coming from Hollsworth toward the farm, overtook Mrs. Haroldson on the point of entering her house from the same direction.

"Hollo, Mrs. Haroldson," he said, as he held open the garden gate to let her pass; "if you had told me this morning you had an errand in the village, I'd have been very pleased to save you the trouble."

She had been too much absorbed hitherto to notice him, and started when she heard his voice.

"I—I have been posting a letter," she stammered, and looked almost guilty in her confusion.

"I'm afraid you think me a troublesome old fellow for poking my nose so often where I'm not wanted," said the captain as they went in-doors, "but perhaps this time I may be a trifle of use. You were saying in the morning it was a pity for the little 'uns to be in the house while all this is going on, and so it is; and if it had been as square with the weekly bills at my lodgings as it was afore the Grand Consolidated went to the bottom, I'd have taken 'em away with me then and there afore you could say Jack Robinson. Howsomer, I've been back and had a grand palaver with my landlady—a regular tough old figure-head she is—and she says she's willing to let me take 'em home for a week or two. What do you say, Mrs. Haroldson? You shall see 'em every day, and I'll warrant to make 'em happy. Hollo! my hearties, where are you off to?—I can't set sail without my first and second mates, you know."

"They are up stairs," said Mrs. Haroldson. "But—but don't call them, please; they would only be tantalized."

Alas! how sorely was she tantalized herself! For she felt that had this offer come an hour earlier, Minnie might have been hers still.

"Tantalized! who wants to tantalize 'em?" said the captain. "You don't think I've been saying all this to back out of it, do you?"

"Oh no! but . . . Dear Captain Pullyn, don't think me ungrateful for your kindness—I can never forget it, but" . . .

"But what? Come, out with it."

"We have made another arrangement," she said, looking very pale. And then, bit by bit, the poor woman came out with her story; how her sister had offered them help on condition of gaining possession of Minnie, how at first they had refused, preferring all extremities to such a sacrifice, and how at last the child herself had unconsciously extorted their consent. But vainly she sought the captain's eye for a sign of approval. He shook his head, and looked more stern than ever she had seen him.

"It was for the darling's own good," she protested feverishly. "Whatever comes of it, it was done for her good."

"It can not be for her good that she should learn to forget her father and mother," responded the captain gravely.

In spite of his benevolence, he had a touch of sternness in his nature which made him come out with harsh things occasionally.

The next moment the sight of Mrs. Haroldson's white woe-begone face made him sorry he had said so much, and feeling that it was cruel to give reasons against a step already taken, he

put out his hand and strode away with a hoarse "God bless you."

No sooner did she find herself alone than the poor mother staggered into a chair, and let her head fall forward on her clasped hands with a groan of pain. The captain's words pressed upon her brain like lead. Could it be that in rending her soul in twain she had not even compassed that which she sought—the good of the child whom she desired to rescue from the ills of her own fate? Could it be that she condemned her daughter to suffer a poverty worse than that represented by forced sales and sheriff's officers—the poverty of the heart? She dared not examine the question too closely. Be it as it might, it was too late to retract now. And then was it not possible, nay probable, that Minnie might not learn to forget her father and mother after all, that she might elect to return to them at the end of her six months' probation?

Probable or possible, the mother's heart clung to the hope which this chance left her, as a drowning man clings to the plank which may save him, or may but prolong his agony.

CHAPTER VI.

DELIVERED AS PER CONTRACT.

ONE day, about a week after Mrs. Haroldson had signified her consent to her sister's offer, the Fanshawe carriage, with the powdered coachman and footman appertaining thereto, once more stood at the farm-house gate, while in the farm-house kitchen there sat a prim maid-servant taking a very disparaging survey of her surroundings. This was the day appointed for Minnie's induction into her new home, whither the carriage and the powdered coachman and footman and the prim maid-servant were waiting to convey her.

In strange contrast to all this pomp of claret-colored panels, white silk calves, gold lace and flaunting ribbons, was a scene taking place the while in a room up stairs—the room where John Haroldson had lain for so many weeks, and still lay, for he had made but little progress during the last few days, and had not yet found energy or strength to leave his bed. Mrs. Haroldson, her eyes all red and swollen with weeping, was kneeling before Minnie, investing her with a neat little hat and pelisse on which the mother's fingers had been busy some days before in anticipation of the occasion. Minnie herself, just beginning to realize the fact that she was to leave father and mother and Amy for an indefinite time and to go alone among strangers, was crying bitterly at the prospect; while Amy, not understanding very well what was the matter, stood by looking at her sister with vague affrighted interest, such as may be felt in a victim ordered out for execution.

On the bed lay John Haroldson, his face turned toward the wall, and the bed-clothes huddled round his head as though to shut out sight and sound. But they could not have been quite effectual for the purpose, for every now and then something would be said to make the apparently inanimate form perceptibly wince.

"I don't want to go to Aunt Fanshawe's," protested Minnie through her tears—"not unless

twice as much afraid of her as when they had met in the farm-house kitchen.

To her, however, Aunt Fanshawe, awe-inspiring as she was in her grandeur, was evidently disposed to be gracious.

"Come in, my dear child," she said encouragingly, seeing that Minnie seemed inclined to linger on the threshold. "Harris, if your master has come home, go and tell him that I wish him to step this way."

Harris, which was the name of the prim maid-servant who had been appointed Minnie's special attendant, departed on her errand, leaving her charge to feel more hopelessly forlorn than ever. The child would never have had courage to pilot her way through the curiously fashioned chairs and richly inlaid tables to her aunt, but her aunt made things easy by coming to her instead.

"Sit down, my dear," and Mrs. Fanshawe placed herself on a sofa and drew her niece to her side. "And now tell me, how do you like to be here?"

Minnie's lip quivered strangely, but she made no answer.

"You must not be shy with me, my little darling. You are to be very fond of me, you know, and I shall be very fond of you. It will be very nice, will it not?"

On finding herself addressed thus kindly, Minnie's lip quivered more and more; and she was just about to burst into a flood of tears little expected by her aunt, when the door opened and a gentleman appeared whose entrance forced back the tears to their source anew.

He was a very tall gentleman, taller even than the white-haired footmen, and he had a bald patch on the top of his head which struck the child as peculiarly impressive. He had a pair of very large gray whiskers and wore a white neckcloth, and this to Minnie completed his description. Whether because of his height, or his bald patch, or his gray whiskers, or his white neckcloth, she felt very much afraid of him, especially when he came and stood close to where she sat, staring at her.

"This is the little girl, Henry," said Mrs. Fanshawe, laying her hand on Minnie's head. "A dear little thing, isn't she, and very like me?"

"So I should say," answered the gentleman, and continued staring rather unmeaningly.

"I knew you would think so, Henry. See, my dear, this gentleman is your uncle Fanshawe."

Minnie said nothing, but looked up into his face with her round blue eyes as if fascinated—not in a complimentary sense, however, but quite the reverse.

"Why can't you say something, Henry?"

"I have nothing to say, my dear," responded the gentleman, languidly. "The bank has raised the rate again, but you don't care for that."

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Fanshawe, tartly. "I mean the child, why can't you find something to talk to her about?"

The gentleman looked very much perplexed, but obediently set himself to consider, and at length brought out:

"I hope you are quite well to-day."

Minnie hardly knew at first whether this was

intended for her or not, but, on being coaxingly admonished by Mrs. Fanshawe to speak to her uncle, managed to respond with a feeble "Yes, thank you."

The gentleman paused, quite at a loss how to carry on the conversation. At last a bright thought struck him, and he asked:

"How old are you, little girl, and what is your name?"

She was again admonished by her aunt, and presently answered, rather more fluently this time, for it was according to established formula:

"Six years old last birthday, and my name is Minnie Haroldson."

"And a very nice name too," said her aunt, graciously. "But don't you fancy that perhaps Minna sounds prettier—more important, you know? I think in future it must be Minna, what do you say, dear?"

The child did not answer; the first terror inspired by the strange gentleman was gradually wearing off, and the little eyes were beginning to fill again.

"And talking of names, don't you think Fanshawe is a very pretty name?" went on her aunt, musingly. "Good gracious, child, what's the matter?"

She had just discovered that Minnie's eyes were full of tears, which now began to drop very fast on the ribbon her mother had arranged so carefully.

"What are you crying for? what do you want?" demanded Mrs. Fanshawe, in amazement.

"I want to go home," said Minnie, breaking at this into a piteous howl. "I want to go home to father and mother and Amy."

"Hush, hush, I am quite shocked. This is your home now, my dear—don't you think it is a very nice one?"

"I want father and mother and Amy," repeated Minnie, sobbing. "I want" . . .

"My dear child, how can you go on so? you ought to know better, really. Don't cry any more, my love—I will be your mamma, and this gentleman your papa."

She tried to put her arm round the child as she spoke, but Minnie pushed it roughly away with both hands.

"You shan't," the little voice cried impetuously. "I don't want you to be my mamma, and I won't let you. Oh dear! where are father and mother and Amy? Oh dear! dear!"

A succession of violent sobs drowned her farther utterance, and Mrs. Fanshawe looked dubiously at her husband; she was beginning to question the success of her experiment.

"Who would have thought of her having such a passionate temper? What a dreadful noise, to be sure! it seems to go through my very head. My dear, dear child, do have a little pity for my nerves. We shall be so happy if you will only be quiet."

But Minnie, instead of being quiet, redoubled the vehemence of her lamentations, turning away from her aunt's attempted caresses almost as though resenting them.

"Do you know I begin to fear she is rather heartless?" said the lady, and her countenance was very blank.

Mr. Fanshawe, who made a point of agreeing with his wife in every thing, said he feared so

too, and they both looked at Minnie as though they could have wished her considerably farther.

At this point—a very critical one in Minnie's career—the door was suddenly flung open by one of the tall footmen, and at the same moment a stentorian voice announced:

"Mrs. Vesey and Miss Vesey."

Minnie had been sitting near the door, and the stentorian voice sounded close at her ear. Her first impression was that the tall footman had come to do something dreadful to her, and the idea was so terrible as to petrify her into silence at once, with her eyes turned toward the door in trembling expectation of what was to happen next. When she found that he did not advance farther into the room and only held the door open long enough to admit a gorgeous lady, rustling louder if possible than Aunt Fanshawe, followed by a little girl two or three years older than herself—but oh! so much more grandly dressed—she transferred her awe-struck interest to them instead, and sat watching their movements in mute, puzzled wonderment.

"Mrs. Vesey!" cried Mrs. Fanshawe, starting from her seat with hospitable enthusiasm. "I am so very, very glad to see you. And you have brought your little girl too, I see—a sweet child she looks, to be sure. Now this is what I call really kind."

Mrs. Fanshawe's raptures were on this occasion quite genuine. The visitor was not rich, was indeed poor as compared to the Fanshawes; but in right of her position as the daughter of a baronet of good family she was one of the acknowledged leaders of St. Austin's society, and the rich merchant's wife had been for years dying to get on her visiting list. This had at last been accomplished by the good offices of a common friend, and Mrs. Fanshawe, who had made her first call a few days before, was in unfeigned ecstasy to find it so quickly returned.

"You are very good, I'm sure," said Mrs. Vesey, who was aware of the increasing importance of Mr. Fanshawe's commercial position, and considered the family decidedly worth cultivation. "My dear Arabella, shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe."

At this moment she became aware of a pair of wondering blue eyes which, opened to their widest extent, were gazing at her, half curiously, half affrightedly, from behind Mrs. Fanshawe's ample skirts.

"What a beautiful child!" she exclaimed, almost involuntarily. "You must be very proud of her, Mrs. Fanshawe, I am sure. And do you know I see a great likeness to her mamma?"

"She is considered very like me," said Mrs. Fanshawe, with a sudden flush of gratification. The implied compliment to her good looks was very pleasant, but more delicious to her still, perhaps, was the maternal dignity with which her visitor's hypothesis had for the moment invested her. "But—but—I have no family of my own, Mrs. Vesey. She is the daughter of a—a relation—a distant relation, that is—and is only staying with me on a visit. However, she is a dear little girl, and I am very fond of her."

She looked down very complacently on her little niece, to whom she felt almost grateful for the compliment which the child had been the means of obtaining for her. And then how

signally Mrs. Vesey's admiration of Minnie confirmed her own discernment and good taste!

But Minnie did not respond to the complacent look at all, and was so manifestly on the point of outraging decorum by a new fit of crying, that her aunt rang the bell in some alarm, telling the footman who answered it—

"Thomas, send Harris to take Miss Minna up to the nursery."

Harris made her appearance, and Minnie was removed, happily without scandal in the shape of fresh tears, and her aunt explained:

"She has only just arrived from a distance, and is sadly tired with her journey, poor dear child. I am so glad you are pleased with her, Mrs. Vesey. For myself, I have taken a prodigious fancy to her. In fact (between ourselves this is), I have serious thoughts of adopting her, for I lead a terribly dull life sometimes—with Mr. Fanshawe out all day, and even when he is at home so engrossed in business that he has hardly a word to say to me."

She darted a reproachful look at Mr. Fanshawe, who cowed guiltily.

"It would be a very good plan," said Mrs. Vesey sympathizingly. "A child is *such* a companion, you know. What I should do without my Arabella, for instance, I am sure I have no idea."

The remark had the effect of making Arabella the subject of conversation; and, after a few minutes spent in discussing that young lady, her dispositions, and acquirements, Mrs. Vesey departed, very favorably impressed by the style in which her new friend lived. Mr. Fanshawe, much relieved, went back to his study to finish an elaborate calculation turning on the probable price of Scotch pig that day three weeks, and Mrs. Fanshawe was left to herself, thinking—

"There may be a good deal of trouble with her at first, I dare say, but keep her I must and will."

And thus resolving, she went up stairs to the nursery.

It was quite an event for Mrs. Fanshawe, this going up stairs for the first time to her nursery. She had never had a nursery before, and the consciousness that such a sanctuary was at last hers—actually existed on the second floor of her own house, with a little inmate in it ready-made just at the age when children begin to be interesting without giving too much trouble—thrilled her with an entirely new feeling of dignity and importance. The ordering of Miss Minna up to the nursery in the presence of Mrs. Vesey had been one of the grand sensations of her life.

Mrs. Fanshawe's nursery was a very pleasant room—light and airy, situated in the most cheerful part of the house, and carefully fitted with all suitable appointments under her own superintendence. The evening was fine and sunny, and Mrs. Fanshawe thought she had never looked at a more charming interior than now when she peeped in and saw the pretty room, with the warm evening light shining on its bright-colored paper and gay chintz hangings, and little golden-haired Minnie sitting at tea near one of the open windows. She was not quite so much pleased, however, a moment afterward, when on advancing she found that Minnie was not eating, but slowly letting one big tear after another fall on a huge slice of bread and butter which she

held intact in her hand. Still, remembering the gratifying scene down stairs, Mrs. Fanshawe would not let herself be disheartened.

"Why, Minna dear," she said, going up and taking a seat at the tea-table, "I am afraid you don't seem to be getting on very well with your tea. What's the matter?"

"I'm not hungry," said Minnie, staring dolefully at her bread and butter, and letting fall another tear.

"But you ought to be hungry, my love, after all you have done to-day. Harris, bring out the jam; I wonder you did not think of giving the poor child a little this evening. You like jam, dear, don't you?"

"Yes, I like jam," said Minnie a little ungraciously. She was not in the mood to let herself be coaxed if she could help it; still a fact was a fact, and not to be controverted.

"Put down that great crust, dear, and I'll cut a nice delicate little slice for you myself, with plenty of jam on it. There, just taste that, Minna, and tell me how you like it."

Minnie took a languid bite in obedience to her aunt's injunctions. The bread was new and the jam laid on very thickly, and as she had not tasted any thing since the morning, she found herself more interested than a moment before she could have supposed.

"Well, my dear, it is very nice, isn't it?"

"Very nice," said Minnie, and took another bite on her own account. She went on munching for a minute or two in silence, to Mrs. Fanshawe's infinite satisfaction, then at last, addressing her aunt for the first time spontaneously, said:

"Aunt Fanshawe."

"Well, my love?"

"I may go home to-morrow to father and mother and Amy, mayn't I?"

Her aunt was rather staggered by the question; she was afraid of negating it too decidedly in case of a repetition of the stormy scene interrupted by Mrs. Vesey's visit.

"To-morrow, dear? Well, I don't think it must be quite so soon as to-morrow. To-morrow I was intending to take you out with me to look at some of the pretty shops, and to see if we could find any thing in them that you would like for your own. Did you ever see a talking doll, Minna?"

The child opened her eyes with astonishment.

"A talking doll! But dolls don't talk."

"Oh yes! they do—some of them. I know a shop—I was thinking of taking you there to-morrow—where there are large dolls as big as real babies, that can open and shut their eyes and say 'Mamma' quite plainly. You would like such a doll as that, wouldn't you, dear?"

Minnie's eyes, which had been opening wider and wider at the description, were dropped shyly at this; she paused, and then murmured very timidly:

"Yes, please."

"That's right, dear; then you shall go with me to-morrow and choose one."

The child's face flushed with pleasure. She pondered a little, and then said:

"And when I go home may I take it with me? Amy will be so surprised—I dare say at first she will think it is a real baby."

"I dare say. But as Amy lives so far off,

perhaps we had better go first and show it to some of the nice little girls I know at St. Austin's. I shall take you to-morrow to pay them a visit, and we shall ask two or three of them to come and dine with you. And after dinner, Minna, we shall all go together to see Herr Schleitowand."

"I don't know what that is."

"Herr Schleitowand is a very clever gentleman who is staying here a few days to show the people of St. Austin's what he can do. And he can do such wonderful things—you will be quite surprised. What do you think of him making a plum-pudding in a hat, Minna?—mixing it, and boiling it, and turning it out quite ready—and all in less than five minutes."

"But he couldn't," said Minnie, incredulously. "I am quite sure he couldn't. Make a pudding in a hat! nobody could do that, you know."

"You shall see him do it to-morrow, Minna, and he will give you a slice to taste."

Minnie became transfixed with amazement, which increased as her aunt went on.

"But that is not nearly all he does. He can tear a pocket-handkerchief in two, and then with a wave of his hand mend it again so that you can't see the join; he can put a knife into his mouth and swallow it, and bring it out again presently at his wrist; and he can make a shilling dance on the table as if it were alive."

Minnie had been holding her breath with wonder, and came out now with a great panting "Oh!" necessary for the relief alike of her lungs and her bewildered faculties. This was followed by an interval of silence, during which she was collecting her ideas and otherwise recovering herself, and then she added with great decision:

"I should like to see him very much."

"We are going there to-morrow, my love."

"It will be very nice," rejoined Minnie emphatically. "Dear me! only fancy what father and mother will say when they hear where I have been. Do you think they ever saw him?"

"I can't say, I'm sure."

"I know Amy never did. I wonder what she will think when I tell her. Make a plum-pudding in a hat—the idea! And swallow a knife—how dreadful! Doesn't it hurt him very much?"

"I don't suppose it does, dear, or he wouldn't do it."

"But it must look dreadful to see him, must it not? I think Amy would be quite frightened. Oh dear! I wish it was to-morrow already."

She made a quick petulant little movement of impatience, and her aunt smiled with inward gratification. Just then there was heard a knock at the nursery door, and a servant entered to say that dinner was served down stairs. Mrs. Fanshawe knew that her husband did not like to be kept waiting for dinner, and, indulgent to this little weakness, rose at once.

"I must say good-night now, Minna, you will be in bed by the time I have finished dinner. Will you kiss me, and say good-night?"

Minnie held up her mouth without hesitation. "Good-night, Aunt Fanshawe. What a very funny gentleman that must be!"

"Yes, I am sure you will think so when you see him. But can't you call me something else

than always Aunt Fanshawe, dear? It is such a long name."

"It is your name, isn't it?" said Minnie, looking puzzled.

"Yes, but you must find something else to call me by for short. Call me mamma. Mamma is so much shorter than Aunt Fanshawe."

"But you are not mamma," reasoned Minnie. "Mamma is mother's name, only I say mother instead."

"Never mind, dear, call me mamma, it is so much shorter."

"You are not mamma," obstinately persisted the child.

"But you can call me mamma, can't you?" retorted Mrs. Fanshawe, a little sharply. "Come, my sweet child, let me hear you say it—Good-night, mamma."

"No, I won't," said Minnie rebelliously.

The little mouth began to work ominously, and Mrs. Fanshawe understood that if she persisted farther she would have all the work of pacification to recommence. So with a forced laugh she gave up her point.

"You little funny thing! Well, call me Aunt Fanshawe or any thing you like. And now good-night. Harris will give you the rest of your tea—take care she has what she likes, Harris—and at breakfast I shall come and talk to you again, and tell you what more I can remember about this clever gentleman we are going to see."

She kissed the child again, and hurried from the room, leaving Minnie to finish her tea and question Harris concerning the wonderful gentleman who swallowed knives and made plum-puddings in his hat.

This topic, combined with hunger and bread and jam, proved so interesting that Minnie cried no more during the meal, nor indeed afterward until she was being tucked up in her little bed for the night. Then she remembered that she had always till now been tucked up by her mother's hands, and the absence of those hands—so kind, so caressing, and so dexterous at their task—made the hot tears flow forth anew. They continued to flow long after Harris had left her alone in the prettily furnished little bedroom leading out of the nursery—the most prettily furnished room in which she had ever slept—long after the light of the summer evening had melted into dusk, even after dusk had darkened into night.

But nature came at last to her relief, and in pure exhaustion she fell asleep, dreaming that Amy had been changed by the clever gentleman into a talking doll.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HARK, HOW I'LL BRIBE YOU."

THE programme arranged by Mrs. Fanshawe was carried out in all its details next day, with general satisfaction to those concerned.

Minnie was taken to the best toy-shop of St. Austin's, and there presented with the largest and most fashionably dressed doll to be found on the premises—one which possessed the farther recommendation of emitting under certain conditions a discordant and unearthly noise, more resembling

the quack of a duck than any other sound known in nature. After this purchase, and such a survey of the remaining wonders of the establishment as might be supposed to whet a desire to return on a future occasion, she was taken round to be introduced to a select circle of young friends, by whose society her aunt hoped to supply the companionship of Amy. Then came dinner, and afterward a visit to Herr Schleitowand's, where the child sat spell-bound with astonishment and curiosity—the marvels of the performance surpassing her wildest imaginings. There was no time to cry for home that day, even had she felt so disposed, but indeed she was far too much excited and interested to do any thing except open her eyes very wide and ask a multiplicity of questions. Not that she had ceased to think of father and mother and Amy, for she was chattering about them constantly, but her thoughts of them seemed to be all colored by the interests of the day. Instead of impatiently asking when she should return to them, she was always speculating on whether they could have seen this, that, or the other thing, and what they would say of it if they had. Evidently she would have preferred for the present that they should come to her rather than that she should go back to them.

Aunt Fanshawe noted the change of tone, and was well satisfied. She would have been better pleased doubtless if the refrain of father and mother and Amy had recurred less frequently; but her experience of yesterday had taught her to be content with making slow approaches toward her object. Thus she did not thwart the child in speaking of the three persons who had hitherto constituted her world, nor did she commit the mistake of laying claim to any nearer and dearer title than that of Aunt Fanshawe.

That evening Minnie cried herself to sleep again—the foolish tears would break forth when she found herself in her lonely bed with no mother's face watching her—but sleep came much more speedily than the night before.

Another day followed, and another and another, and it was always contrived that Minnie should be interested and amused. Now it was a visit to the toy-shop to buy a peep-show; now it was a mysterious summons to come and look at something waiting for her in the garden—the "something" proving to be an exquisite little Shetland pony bought expressly for Minnie's riding; now it was an entertainment given by her to her little friends, the chief feature of which was that real tea was served in china cups no bigger than a walnut-shell; now it was a magic-lantern exhibition; now a traveling circus; and so forth in never-ending variety.

Time passed on, and Minnie gradually began to bring the familiar home names less frequently into her conversation; and indeed it was not wonderful, considering how much else she had to think about and talk about. Every now and then, it is true, she would be seized with a fit of homesickness, and ask very wistfully when she was to see father and mother and Amy again; on which she would always be told that they were all quite well, and that father and mother would be glad to hear she was a good girl and did not fret. She found out by degrees that all her questionings and petitionings on this point did nothing to procure for her what she wanted, and slowly accustomed herself to transfer them

to objects which she had a better chance of attaining.

At last she learned to fall asleep at night without crying, while in the day her laugh began to be heard without any particular pains being taken to excite it. The sound of that spontaneous, joyous laugh was like music in Mrs. Fanshawe's ears.

Weeks passed, then months, and Minnie had been living in her aunt's house for what seemed to her an incalculable period of time—so long that the idea of home, when she recalled it, appeared to be seen through a mist, as the memory of a dream, while her new life, so uncomfortably strange and unfamiliar at first, had grown to be the most natural and matter-of-course thing in the world.

One day—long as the time looked to Minnie, it was in reality a little less than six months from the date of her arrival at St. Austin's—Mrs. Fanshawe called her, and asked her what she thought of getting up a ball for her little friends.

"A ball!" cried Minnie, her eyes sparkling with delight. "A ball like what you went to last week, where they dance and play music and eat supper all night long! Oh, Aunt Fanshawe, you don't mean that, do you?"

"Yes, I do, my dear. I have a list here of all the little boys and girls whom you might ask, and I find there would be more than fifty. I would have the carpet up in the drawing-room and the floor chalked, and festoons of flowers put up over the doorways—just as I told you they had at Mrs. Robinson's. And then there would be supper served in the dining-room, and" . . .

"Aunt Fanshawe! do you really mean it?"

"Certainly, dear child. You do your steps so nicely now that I don't think there need be any hesitation about it. Suppose we drive round to-day to Miss Styles's, and ask her what sort of dress you ought to have? I was thinking that white tarlatane over a pink satin skirt, looped up with white or pink roses—with a pretty little wreath of something in your hair" . . .

"For me—all that for me! And you really are not joking?"

"I never was more serious in my life. Do you think that would make a pretty dress?"

"Oh, Aunt Fanshawe! it will be lovely!"

"Then suppose I sit down now and write out the invitations for this day fortnight? Look here, Minna, this is my list—I have not left any one out, have I?"

The child came forward, and, leaning against her aunt's knees (all the old awe had long ago worn off), cast her eyes on a paper which Mrs. Fanshawe held before her. It was headed "List of Guests for Minna's Ball."

There was something so charming in the conjunction of the two last words that Minnie's delight fairly overflowed.

"Oh! how beautiful it will be!" she cried, rocking herself rapturously to and fro. "Won't it—won't it?"

She turned her bright little face up as she spoke. The movement brought her lips within a few inches of her aunt's—a proximity which seemed to be suggestive, for, as though yielding to a sudden impulse, she put her arm round Mrs. Fanshawe's neck and kissed her.

It was the first time Minnie had kissed her unasked, and Mrs. Fanshawe was in ecstasy.

"You dear darling!" she exclaimed, holding

the child clasped to her side. "You are very much pleased then?"

"Oh yes! Aunt Fanshawe—very much indeed," said Minnie gratefully.

And then she tried to release herself, but in vain.

"Aunt Fanshawe—always Aunt Fanshawe! 'Mamma' is so much shorter. Come, Minna dear, let it be 'Mamma.'"

Minnie made no answer. Aunt Fanshawe was holding her rather uncomfortably, so that she could not turn her head, and she was impatient to look over the list of guests.

"Dear child," whispered Mrs. Fanshawe, "it shall be mamma—shall it not? Say 'Yes, mamma,' there's a pet."

"Yes, mamma," said Minnie. The words were breathed in a very low voice, almost as if she were ashamed of them, but they were enough for Mrs. Fanshawe, over whose face came a glow of triumph and exultation.

And then Minnie got loose, and the debate on the approaching festivity was continued with new ardor.

For the next few days all was excitement and hubbub in Mrs. Fanshawe's house and Minnie's head. Nothing was said, or done, or thought of, that had not some bearing on the forthcoming great event. As for Minnie, sleeping and waking, her mind was running on satin skirts and tarlatanes, and artificial flowers, and white kid shoes and open-worked silk stockings, and chalked floors and ornamented doorways, and long supper-tables, as constantly as though the giving of a ball was to her the great be-all and end-all of existence. And so indeed it is pretty certain that for the time it was. But Mrs. Fanshawe never made any attempt to moderate the intensity of her expectation.

Day after day passed on, and the preparations for the great occasion gradually advanced toward maturity. The carpet in the drawing-room was taken up, the upholsterers were getting on with the decorations, the confectioner had received his orders about the supper, little programmes of the dances had been printed on satin paper, the musicians were engaged—in fine, all the necessary machinery had been set in motion and was working bravely. And at last, on the day before that fixed for the entertainment, Miss Styles sent home the dress.

What a triumph of art it looked, to be sure, as it lay spread on the couch in Mrs. Fanshawe's bed-room, with its rose-bud trimmings and flowing folds of tarlatane well shaken out and displayed in their fullest glory! And then the exquisite little wreath made to match which had been sent home with it! Minnie could not repress a shriek of enthusiasm at the sight.

"How beautiful! And is that really for me? I shall be grander than any body else in the room to-morrow evening, shan't I?"

"I should think you would, my dear; it will become you beautifully, I am certain."

"That it will. I may try it on, mayn't I? Shall I run and call Harris to help me?"

"Presently, dear. But sit down a few minutes by me. I have something to say to you first. Are you attending, Minna?"

"Yes, Aunt Fan—yes, I mean," answered Minnie absently, taking her eyes with difficulty off Miss Styles's *chef-d'œuvre*.

She had not yet got into the habit of calling Mrs. Fanshawe mamma, but she conceded so far as seldom or never to use the more distant appellation to which her aunt objected."

"Minna, do you ever think of home now?"

Minnie started; she had been thinking very little of home for the last few days.

"Oh yes," she answered, hanging her head a little. "Dear me, what *would* father and mother and Amy say if they saw me in such a beautiful dress as that?"

"You were very anxious to return to them a few months ago. What would you think if I let you go back to-morrow morning?"

"Go back to see father and mother and Amy! oh! I should like it so much!" and the childish blue eyes glistened at the prospect. "But . . . but not to-morrow morning. To-morrow is the day of the ball, you know."

"I know, my dear child, and I should be very sorry for you to lose the pleasure, I am sure. But if you go at all, it must be to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning! But I can't—you know I can't," argued Minnie, looking very much perplexed. "The ball is to be to-morrow."

"Oh! I should manage to make excuses for you to your little friends—you need not mind on that account. There will be plenty of them, you know, and what with dancing and supper, and talking and laughing, they won't miss you much, I dare say."

Minnie's face looked awful blank.

"I don't know what you mean," she said after a pause, during which she seemed half ready to cry. "I must be at the ball—I must wear my beautiful new dress. Tell father and mother I can't come till the day after to-morrow."

"It can not be managed so, my love. It is necessary you should go home to-morrow morning, unless indeed you wish to stay with me altogether."

Minnie looked at her new dress, and the tears began to gather in her eyes.

"I don't know what you mean," she repeated, shaking her head helplessly.

"I will explain. When you came to me first, Minna, it was arranged that you should remain here six months, and that then you should make your choice between going home and staying with me always. This is the last day of the six months; to-morrow they will have quite run out; and your—your friends will expect to hear what you have decided. So you see I must ask you to make up your mind, my dear. What shall we write to them—that they may expect you to-morrow?"

"The day after to-morrow," said Minnie.

"That will not do, my dear. If you stay over to-morrow, you must stay altogether. But that will be very pleasant, won't it? You wouldn't like to leave me, and your pretty pony, and your doll, and your magic-lantern, and all your nice little friends here, surely? And you know you would not be able to take any of them with you."

"What! not Shetland?" said the child ruefully. "But I could come and see him sometimes, you know—oh! I should come very often."

"No, you would not," rejoined Mrs. Fanshawe a little bitterly. "If you go, I should send Shetland back to the man I bought him from, and give away all your playthings to poor little chil-

dren who would know how to value them better than you do. You would never see any of them again. As for your new dress, I think I know a little girl whom it would just fit," she continued with a reflective air.

"But it is mine," said Minnie, fairly crying by this time. "I am to wear it at the ball."

"Yes, if you make up your mind that you will remain to live with me—but not unless. Now you know what you have to choose, and you can answer. Will you stay here always, or go home to-morrow?"

Minnie looked very hard through her tears at the new dress.

"I will stay here, and go home sometimes to see father and mother and Amy. I should like to see them sometimes."

"That will not do either, Minna. If you make up your mind to live with me, there must be no going home to see any body. This will be your home, and you must not think of any other."

"Don't father and mother want to see me then?" asked Minnie with a great burst of tears.

Mrs. Fanshawe turned very red, and hesitated for a moment. She had a conscience—such a conscience perhaps as shrinks from the *malum prohibitum* rather than from the *malum in se*, but still a conscience—and though she could manage a tolerable number of white lies, a downright falsehood stuck in her throat.

"It will be a great deal better for your father and mother—and Amy too—that you should stay with me," she answered at last evasively; "and if you do, it will not be proper or convenient for you to see them. You have been very happy without seeing them for the last six months, I am sure."

"Yes, but I want to see them again for all that, and it is very naughty of them not to want to see me too."

"They are rather ill off, my dear, and would find you very much in their way. Besides, it is for your own good that you should live here rather than there. If you go back to them, you would be poor and badly dressed and have no pretty playthings, but if you stay with me you shall have every thing you want, and be a rich lady some day—as rich as I am."

"And then I may go and see them sometimes—when I am a rich lady like you—mayn't I?" asked the child eagerly.

"Then? Oh yes! certainly—if you wish it. Well, Minna, what is to be done? Shall we let them know that you have chosen to stay with me always, or would you rather go away to-morrow and leave me to apologize to your young friends in the evening? You need not mind about your dress—I can easily find somebody to give it to."

Minnie looked very much frightened.

"No, no," she cried hastily, "I will stay. I would much rather stay."

"My own sweet pet!" exclaimed Mrs. Fanshawe, folding the child delightedly to her breast. "You are a darling lamb, and you will look like a queen to-morrow night, that you will."

But to her disappointment Minnie was crying still.

"Don't cry, love, don't cry. Look, I shall ring for Harris and tell her you would like to have your nice new dress tried on."

The dress was tried on, and, in the contemplation of her own pretty little figure decked out in satin and gauze and flowers, Minnie's tears gradually dried. Somehow she was not quite happy, but she had neither time nor skill to analyze her sensations, and she knew she was going to look very magnificent to-morrow evening.

As for Mrs. Fanshawe, she was very happy indeed—as perfectly happy as a victorious general who has won a battle of which he was not quite sure, and who does not trouble himself with questions as to whether his strategy has been entirely according to the laws of regular warfare. For she knew now that Minnie was altogether hers; and Minnie had been ten times more to her during the past few months than ever had been all the Blenheims and parrots and pet parsons and benighted heathens whose aid had hitherto supported her in the struggle with the tedium of existence.

CHAPTER IX.

WILD PRIMROSES.

THE next day John Haroldson was sitting by the fireside in the farm-house kitchen, resting his chin moodily on one hand, and with the other nervously fingering a bit of crumpled note-paper which lay crushed together in his palm.

It was the paper on which Minnie had copied out in large round-hand characters a neatly expressed little note composed for her by Mrs. Fanshawe, to the effect that she had been offered the alternative of returning to the farm or remaining permanently under her aunt's roof, and had decided on the latter course as the one most conducive to her happiness.

"Unnatural, hard-hearted child!" he muttered, and clenched his hand so tightly that the crushed paper rustled. "She never cared for us, not she. The fool I was to expect her home again!"

He had expected her home again confidently up to that morning—having, either from natural sanguineness of disposition or sheer cowardice, shut out all other possibilities from his calculations. Latterly he had even been counting the days and hours remaining of the period at the end of which, as he undoubtingly believed, she would be restored to him. And in proportion to the strength of his hope was the bitterness of his disappointment.

"A fool indeed!" he went on—"a green ignorant fool. To be taken in by her kissing and her crying and her pretty clinging ways—to believe they meant any thing more than just 'Good-bye, I'm off.' And she may be off for me; she may make her home where she likes so long as it isn't in my house. A cold, unnatural!"

"God bless her wherever she may be!" broke in Mrs. Haroldson.

They were almost the first words she had spoken since the letter had arrived. Assuredly the blow had fallen on her no less sorely than on her husband, but she had breathed no syllable of reproach against her child.

Captain Pullyn—returned a few days before from the first voyage he had made since his mis-

fortunes—had sat watching the scene hitherto in silence, but interposed at this.

"God bless her, I say too, and steer her safe through the breakers—there are plenty of 'em ahead of her—poor little soul. Jack, you're as big a fool as you call yourself, or you wouldn't be thinking harm of the pretty creature for what's no fault of hers. You may as well call it her fault that she's six instead of sixteen. It ain't unnatural what she's done; it would have been unnatural if it had been any thing different—as unnatural as an old head on young shoulders, or a three-decker's guns aboard a fishing smack. If you cut a little craft like that loose from her moorings, you've no business to be surprised that she drifts away from you."

Mrs. Haroldson cast a grateful look at the captain; from her inmost heart she felt bounden to him for taking Minnie's part. And yet his words wounded even while they comforted. They exonerated Minnie, but by implication they blamed the parents who had exposed her to the temptation to which she had succumbed. The mother accepted the blame, feeling that she had deserved it, yet it cut her to the very soul notwithstanding.

But John Haroldson was not to be appeased by any argument of the captain's. He had set his heart upon the child, and his affection was as sensitive as it was deep.

"She never cared for us," he insisted, "she never cared for us. But I've found out my mistake, and there's an end of it."

Mrs. Fanshawe was giving herself some uneasiness all this time lest Minnie's father should repent his bargain, and seek to enforce the claims which law and nature gave him to the possession of his child. She would have been vastly relieved could she have looked into his thoughts, for she would have known then that his feelings toward Minnie were no longer those of love and longing, but of a settled displeasure which was the best guarantee for her own undisturbed enjoyment of her newly acquired proprietary rights.

Meanwhile for Minnie herself things were going on charmingly. Cognizant neither of her father's anger nor of her aunt's fears, she was able to give her whole mind to the extraction of as much happiness as possible from the long-looked-for festival got up in her honor. This went off to perfection, Minnie being the admired of all admirers, and, in right of her toilet no less than of her quality of hostess, the acknowledged queen of the ball-room. So complete were all the arrangements, and so merry was the humor of the company, that she even enjoyed herself not very much less than she had expected, never thinking once of father and mother and Amy, or of the price she had paid for the evening's pleasure. The next day she had a headache and was rather fractious, but she had not yet learned sufficient inductive logic to draw any moral from the circumstance on the hollowness of social pleasures in general and of balls in particular.

Time sped onward, and Minnie became more and more oblivious of her old life, and more and more at home in her new one. Week followed week, and month followed month, and at last father and mother and Amy had dropped altogether out of her conversation, and almost out of her memory. And if by chance something oc-

curred to bring them and her old home to her remembrance, the once familiar scenes and figures—utterly incongruous as they were with all the analogies of her present life—rose before her so hazy and phantom-like that it was difficult to believe she had ever seen them and lived among them in the waking world.

One day—it was nearly two years since the grand Fanshawe carriage with its powdered attendants had carried her off weeping from the garden gate whence a gentle face went smiling after her—she was rudely reminded of the reality of that past which had grown to look so dim and visionary by being told that her mother was dead.

She was old enough now to understand what death meant—old enough to understand that the gracious phantom-like image which at times flitted before her mind's eye had become a phantom indeed, never by any possibility to be made real again in this world. She knew that the vision of those loving eyes beaming tenderly upon her, of those soft arms opened for her to nestle in them, must continue a vision forever now; that the dream of the past must remain in the past always, with no hope of being renewed. And, knowing this, her grief was very bitter—bitter enough to make Mrs. Fanshawe, who vainly strove to comfort her, almost jealous of her poor sister's memory.

Mary Haroldson's unspoken presentiment had indeed been fulfilled. Her husband, though broken in spirit and fortune, had long ago grown hale and strong again; but since Minnie's decision had been made known to her, she had gradually pined and faded—ailing with no specific malady, but week by week becoming paler and thinner. At last she fell ill with a low fever which was prevailing in the village, finding its victims chiefly among the old and infirm; and her enfeebled frame sank under it at once. She knew from the first that she was ill beyond hope of recovery, and would have petitioned her sister for leave to see Minnie once more—the privilege would have almost reconciled her to death—only that she feared infection for the child, and so resigned herself to die without that parting look for which she yearned. On her death-bed she prayed God fervently for both her children, but her last breath was spent in blessing the one who had so long been absent from her.

It was a terrible day for John Haroldson, that on which his wife was taken from him. Those who were with him in the first hour of his bereavement and saw the vacant stunned look on his face, almost feared that his reason must give way under the stroke. But he eluded their vigilance, and got away from them to Captain Pullyn's lodgings, whither little Amy had been sent to be out of the reach of infection. The captain saw at once what had happened in the blank, stony stare with which he entered, and hastened forward with a few words of inarticulate sympathy.

"Yes, she is dead," said Haroldson in dull mechanical tones, looking at his friend as though he scarcely knew him. "Mary is dead."

He sat down with his arms folded, and his gaze directed drearily into space. At this moment little Amy, who had heard the sound of her father's footsteps, came toddling toward him out of a back room, intent on asking when she might go

back to mother. He caught her by the arm, and drew her somewhat roughly to his knee, looking into her face the while with eyes that shone almost fiercely in their sharp searching scrutiny.

"I have nobody left but you now. You will never go away to let your father die alone, will you?"

Amy lifted up her dark eyes, and fixed them upon him wonderingly. There must have been something in his expression which made her feel that the question was a solemn one, for her look grew very grave, and her voice was strangely earnest, as she answered—

"No, I never will."

Her father took her in his arms and strained her with passionate vehemence to his heart. And then for the first time since his wife's death, tears came to his relief, and he wept on the child's neck as though he were a child himself.

As has been said, the blow which carried desolation into her old home fell very heavily upon Minnie also. It was long before she recovered the natural tone of her spirits—long before Mrs. Fanshawe felt secure against being scandalized by an apparently causeless gust of tears and sobs, afterward explained by Minnie herself to have reference to poor dear mother whom she was never to see again. But at last time and the constant petting of her aunt assuaged the violence of her sorrow; and gradually it, and almost the remembrance of it, faded away, as was perhaps only natural. For there was no external incident to reopen the wound or retard its healing, the girl from that time forth growing up without hearing a word to remind her of her old home. And the memory of that old home, as a necessary consequence, fled farther and farther into the past, until at length it was hardly distinguishable in the distance.

Yet, strange to say, at the rare moments when the scenes and associations of her childhood were accidentally recalled to her, they always shone through the mists of time with ineffable brightness and pleasantness. Any thing that reminded her, were it only for an instant, of her old life, was peculiarly grateful to her. The smell of wild primroses, for instance, would lap her in a momentary elysium, for it brought back a time long ago, when she had gathered primroses with her father and Amy in fields greener and sunnier far than she ever saw fields now. There was a golden halo about the past which was wanting to the present, wanting even to that less distant past which followed the date of her arrival under Mrs. Fanshawe's roof.

The cause of this difference of color between the old life and the new she had never tried to discover; perhaps she was hardly conscious that any such difference existed. If she had thought about it at all, she would probably have ascribed her feelings to the illusions of childhood, for assuredly it would never have occurred to her that she could really have been happier in that old despised life which she knew to have been so poor and mean than in the new life which was so comfortable and so altogether as it should be. But whether she was conscious of it or not, a difference of color did exist between her views of past and present—such a difference as there is between poetry and prose, sunshine and shade; and whether she thought of it or not, a real rea-

son for the difference existed also. And the reason was this, that her affections—that part of us which gives the appreciation of poetry and sunshine—had been nourished then, and were starved now. At home she had loved her father and mother and her little sister with the whole force of her nature, whereas there was nobody to love with the whole force of her nature at Mrs. Fanshawe's. It is true that she liked her aunt—her mamma as she called her now—very much, and even believed that she loved her as a daughter should love a mother. But in this belief she was mistaken, for Mrs. Fanshawe, being a woman incapable of feeling any very profound affection herself, was also incapable of inspiring it in others.

And therefore it was that, among all Mrs. Fanshawe's gay parterres and carefully tended conservatories, there was no flower half so sweet to Minnie as wild primroses.

CHAPTER X.

RESTITUTION.

THE scene was again the little garden before Black Moor Farm, and the season was again spring.

Fifteen years had passed since the sunny spring evening that Mrs. Haroldson, with Amy at her side, had watched her husband and little daughter returning to her across the moor. But the time was morning now, the woodlands that formed so pleasant a background to the farm-house and neighboring village being bright with the shimmering of young green leaves, and harmonious with the warbling of many-voiced birds. And instead of the graceful woman and joyous child that had stood at the gate that evening, there was only in the garden now a gray-haired man working among the flowers. The gray-haired man was John Haroldson—his person still showing traces of the old burly strength and vigor, though with a furrowed face and stooping figure that made him look not fifteen but thirty years older than of yore.

The alteration in him contrasted strangely with the almost unchanged aspect of his surroundings. The inanimate objects about him looked nearly the same as they had done formerly—the moor as bleak and barren, the farm-house as cozy and substantial, the garden as trim and nicely kept, the village with its green setting of foliage as picturesque. Altogether, a local Rip Van Winkle who had fallen asleep fifteen years before would, on awakening now, have found wonderfully few changes to perplex him. For Hollsworth was a slow little place, not apt to march with the times, and even the railway which now connected it with St. Austin's had as yet failed to inspire it with the go-ahead spirit of its contemporaries.

While John Haroldson was occupying himself with his flowers, a figure which he might have observed had he been less intent on his task was advancing toward him along the road which led from the village to the farm-house. He was too busy to notice it; but if he had, he might have known it even in the distance for that of a stranger; for the inhabitants of Hollsworth and its environs had lived long enough among each

other to detect a non-resident at once, were it by nothing else than gait and bearing. And the person now approaching the farm had something in both gait and bearing very sufficiently distinguishing him from any of the dapper village shop-keepers or uncouth countrymen who were the most frequent passers-by in that neighborhood.

Not that there was any thing about him that could properly be said to be peculiar, his appearance being simply that of a well-dressed, well-made man, with a powerfully framed figure a little over the middle height, and a grave dark-complexioned face. This was shaded by hair of a rich deep brown, scarcely distinguishable from black; and the eyes—the only feature of the countenance that on a nearer inspection could be called remarkable—were dark, penetrating, and singularly lustrous. The stranger was in reality about three or four-and-thirty years of age, but from the staid, almost stern, expression habitual with him, might easily have been taken for half a dozen years older.

As he came from Hollsworth toward the farm, he seemed to be in deep meditation, walking along with an absorbed absent air which made him look reserved and perhaps a little churlish. At least so thought a group of pretty country lasses who met him on the road, but whom, in spite of the inquisitive looks of laughter-loving eyes and the whispering of silvery voices, he passed with no more attention than if they had been a flock of sheep going to market. On the other hand, he was not too much engrossed to notice the trouble of a little dot of a child that was trying to scale a stile into a field where some elder companions were at play, and lifted it over with a smile that made the grave face look quite other than it had been a moment before.

He walked thoughtfully on till he came to the gate of the farm-house garden. Here he stopped, and looked about him a little uncertainly until his eyes fell on the figure of John Haroldson stooping among his flowers.

"This is Black Moor Farm?" the wayfarer asked with a slight inclination of the head. "I wish to speak for a few minutes with Mr. Haroldson."

The farmer rose and held open the gate, eyeing his visitor curiously the while.

"My name is Haroldson, sir. Step inside, if you please. There is nobody there, for Amy—that's my daughter—has just gone out to do her marketing."

He led the way into the kitchen—comfortable and well-ordered as of old—and set a chair for the new-comer, still evidently at a loss as to what business could have brought him. The latter noticed the questioning look, and said in answer—

"You will not wonder what I have come for, Mr. Haroldson, when you hear who I am. My name is Lee—Raymond Lee. I suppose you have received the letters I have written to you lately?"

The farmer did not reply. He had turned very pale, and fell heavily into a chair as if unable to support himself. The visitor did not remark his agitation, and went on:

"I have written several times, as you know, and, not having had any answer, have made it my business to call at Hollsworth this morning

and discover what had become of you; I was afraid you might have moved from the neighborhood. You see I am impatient, Mr. Haroldson, but I can not help it. I shall not be happy until I have made you such restitution as lies in my power."

"I want no restitution," said the farmer hurriedly, and he spoke with lowered eyes as though not choosing to confront those of his interlocutor. "There, there, that will do; let us forget all about it. Forgive and forget, that's the best way."

Raymond Lee shook his head with a faint smile—a very bitter one it was.

"It is easy for you who have done no wrong to forget, but not so easy for the—wrongdoers, or those who represent them. My father"—a flush started to his brow as the word passed his lips—"my father did a great injury to you and others who trusted him, and I have the right to repair as much of it as I can. I am not able to make up to you and them what he lost for you by mismanagement, any more than I can compensate any of you for what he may have caused you to suffer; but I can at least—and I will—restore the sum of which he actually robbed you."

His lips closed sternly over the words, and, drawing forth his pocket-book, he took out a little bundle of notes, and pushed it toward the farmer.

"Mr. Haroldson, there is your share of the sum lost to the Company by my father's frauds. You will find it makes six hundred pounds. I should have sent it to you weeks ago if you had answered my letters."

"No, no," exclaimed the other in a shaking voice, pushing the notes back again; "I don't want your money, and I won't have it. I never complained about it, did I? and I don't see why you can't leave me alone as I have left you."

Mr. Lee looked surprised, but answered calmly—

"Simply because my father stole money which I have set my heart for years on paying back to the uttermost farthing. And I have paid it back now," he added with a short breath of relief—"yours was the only unsatisfied claim left."

"Claim! What do you mean? I never made a claim on you in my life—you know I never did. Take your money back; I will have nothing to do with it."

"But you must have to do with it," said the visitor, and his voice was very severe in its emphasis. "The money is yours, and if by its repayment I seek to wipe a stain off the name I am unfortunate enough to bear, you have no right to hinder me. I think I may ask you what *you* mean, Mr. Haroldson. Others have not refused to receive their money back, and why should you?"

"Because—because . . . I have no particular reason of course," answered the farmer, stammering in some confusion. "But I am able to do without it, and don't want to hear of it again. You are in business, it will be useful to you. So—so—take it back—we're quits."

The blood rushed into Raymond Lee's dark face.

"You are very unjust, Mr. Haroldson. You despise me and affront me for a crime which I

have never committed, and which I am doing my best to expiate."

"No, no, it is not that—upon my word, it is not that. I respect you, I think you have behaved splendidly, but" . . .

"There is your money, Mr. Haroldson. I am glad to hear you have so good an opinion of me."

The farmer was about to answer, but just as he had taken up the notes to force them back upon the donor, Mr. Lee's tall figure had passed him, and was striding across the threshold. With an inarticulate exclamation of surprise, he rose to follow, and hurried down to the garden gate, but too late—the visitor had departed and would not be recalled.

John Haroldson returned to the house with a brow more clouded than it had been for years. It was as though he had felt a new burden laid upon him, or an old one reimposed. He flung the little packet of notes on the table with an impatient movement of the hand, as though shaking himself free of an object of disgust. Then, with a heavy sigh, he threw himself into a chair by the fireside, and sat morosely watching the smoke as it curled up the chimney. The visit he had received that morning must have recalled old associations strangely, for, as he sat, his thoughts were manifestly busy with the far-off past.

He had remained thus upward of half an hour wrapped in dismal reverie, when a familiar step crunching on the gravel walk made him look round. An old man, who waved his stick cheerily as he caught Haroldson's eye, had opened the gate, and was coming up the little garden toward the house. It was Captain Pully, showing the marks of time in the creases of his rosy apple cheeks and the whiteness of his large frill-like whiskers, but hale and hearty, and looking as if there were plenty of life in him yet. He had taken his final leave of sea-faring now, and had been settled for some time in his former quarters at Hollsworth, feeling more at home near his old friend than anywhere else.

"Well, Jack, I have come to take a look at you, you see. So you have got your money at last, hey?"

"How do you know that?" said Haroldson, and turned moodily toward the fire again.

"How do I know?—how do you think? Why, I had a visit from young Lee myself this morning—came to inquire if you had changed your latitude or walked the plank, or what else had happened to you, that you had never taken any notice of his letters. I suppose he thought I was a good person to come to, as he knew I wasn't shy about answering questions. When he wrote to me six weeks ago to ask what bank I should like four hundred pounds paid into, I told him at once. No nonsense about me, I flatter myself. So he wouldn't let you hang off any longer, I suppose?"

"There is the money—he left it behind him," said Haroldson, sullenly. "But I told him I didn't want it, and I don't."

"Bosh!" commented the captain, "you'll find plenty to do with it, I warrant. Well, what did you think of him—a fine young fellow, isn't he?"

"I don't know really—I did not notice."

"Didn't you? More so the pity then, that's

all. But I can tell you, Jack, he's a splendid chap—so clever and long-headed, and not a grain of pride in him for all he's such a big man in the world. What do you think, now, of him remembering little Joe, and wanting to see him again?"

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, indeed," rejoined the captain, rubbing his hands gleefully. "As he was sheering off, I took the opportunity, which personally I never had afore, of thanking him for what he did once for my boy Joe, when he boarded the two big 'uns that were for running him down at school. He didn't know what I meant at first, but I brought it to his mind presently, and he laughed, and said, 'Was that your Joe?' says he, 'I remember him, a fine little lad he was' (which he was and no mistake), 'and what is he doing of now?' he says. So I told him he was with Brown Brothers, at St. Austin's, and giving great satisfaction, and he seemed quite pleased to think of the little fellow he knew at school being in the same town with him; and says he, 'you must give me his address, captain, I should like to see him sometimes.' Which I did of course, and my opinion is that he'll be a friend to Joe for life. What do you think of that, hey?"

"I'm sure I can't say. I don't want to hear any thing more about him."

"Come, come, mate, that ain't fair, 'pon my word it ain't. By-gones are by-gones, and you mustn't be always fishing 'em up again. This young fellow never did you an ounce of harm in his life, and as for the father, you can afford to let him abide where he is, which is under ground most like by this time."

The farmer bent down to push farther into the grate a cinder which seemed on the point of falling, but managed so awkwardly that three or four others came rattling out instead.

"Why, what makes you think that?" he asked, with a short laugh at his own clumsiness.

"Well, it looks like it, don't it, seeing that he has never been sighted since the day he cut his moorings fifteen year ago. Not but what he'd do his best to keep himself close, and, being such a deep 'un as he was, there's no saying that he mightn't succeed. But anyhow he'll never trouble you again, you know."

Haroldson gave another of his short laughs.

"No, I should think not. Ha! ha! what an idea."

"And therefore I say it's a confounded shame you should bear so hard on a fine young fellow like that, for no fault in the world but for being ~~this~~ father's son. An honorable open-handed chap, that no sooner comes into property but he rakes up people he never heard of, and pays 'em money they no more expected to see again than"—the captain paused for a moment to find a suitable figure—"than as if it had been hid at the bottom of the Devil's Coal-Cellar," he added triumphantly.

Surely the farmer was very clumsy to-day, for at this moment the poker, which he had been mechanically balancing between his finger and thumb, clattered noisily down on the hearth.

"You are driving me stupid with your chatter," he muttered angrily, after a few seconds' pause.

"So I see," said the captain, with imperturbable good-humor. "Come, Jack, don't lose your temper, whatever you do. I should have

thought it would have been all fair weather and fair winds with you this morning, after getting such a heap of money."

"Money, money—what do you mean by all ways talking to me about money? What did I want with his money? He comes with his bits of tissue paper, and thinks he has made all clear on his side of the account, does he? But he hasn't, confound him—no indeed he hasn't. I've lost a wife and a child through his father's means—can he give me back them, I wonder? Not that I want the girl again, though—Lord forbid—a cold, hollow-hearted" . . .

"There you go again, there you go again—it's the poor little un's turn now. I declare, Jack, I don't think you've got any reasonableness left."

"Then God forgive them that knocked it out of me. And they want to make amends with money, do they? money! It's all right now, they think—their side stands quite clear, quite clear. But I can tell them the balance is against them yet."

And as he spoke, he absolutely trembled with excitement.

"Yes, yes, who says it isn't?" answered the captain, soothingly. "He never thought to make it all up to you, Jack, how could he? But six hundred pound is six hundred pound, and that's better than nothing, anyhow."

"Better than nothing, is it? It's the same as nothing to me—I won't touch a penny of it."

"Fol de rol de lol. Try some one else with that story, Jack. It would be a good job for you and me too if we could afford to chuck six hundred pound overboard without touching a penny of it."

"I can afford to pay my way without help from him," returned Haroldson, surlily. "If I've got a roof over my head and keep out of debt, it's enough for me, and thank God I can manage that without his money or any body else's."

The vaunt was not unfounded, for ~~John~~ Haroldson, though still poor, was no longer in difficulties. By a long course of industry and frugality he had even managed to repay the sum advanced by Mrs. Fanshawe, which that lady, looking on it as Minnie's purchase money, would willingly have let him retain. But he regarded it in the same light himself, and for that very reason obstinately insisted on rendering it back to the last sixpence. He had parted with his child—or rather, as he put it to himself, she had parted with him—but sold her he had not.

And now, to the discomfiture of the captain, he seemed disposed to be equally, and less intelligibly, obstinate in his rejection of the money proffered by the representative of the man who had robbed him.

"I don't want it, and I won't have it," he summed up passionately. "I'd throw it into the fire sooner than be a farthing the richer for it."

He spoke so vehemently that his friend was a little apprehensive of seeing him put the threat into execution.

"It's a sin to talk of throwing good Bank of England notes into the fire while there are poor folks in the world to give 'em to," expostulated the captain gravely. "But you don't mean it, Jack; if I thought you did, I'd take out a writ of what-you-may-call ~~it~~ quirendo against you. Look, here comes Miss Amy—I wonder what she'd say if she heard you go on so."

Just then a tripping footstep sounded lightly on the gravel walk. The farmer made a sudden swoop upon the notes, and thrust them hastily into his pocket.

"Not a word to her, mind. She is not to know any thing about it."

Captain Pullyn wondered at his friend's unwonted secretiveness, but did not pursue the subject farther. The reviled money had been taken up and pocketed, and there, as it seemed to him, was an end of the matter. Jack Haroldson wasn't so big a fool as you might think to hear him talk.

But whether Jack Haroldson was a fool or not, three advertisements were inserted that week in the second column of *The Times* by as many of the great London hospitals, acknowledging the receipt of a sum of £200 each, which had been forwarded by an anonymous benefactor.

CHAPTER XI.

RAYMOND LEE.

WHILE his visit was thus discussed in John Haroldson's kitchen, Raymond Lee was making his way back to St. Austin's and his own house, which he entered while it was still early in the afternoon. It was not often that he was to be found at home during the day-time, his waking hours being mostly passed at the large gun factory which was his place of business, and of which, after years spent there, first as clerk and then as manager, he was now sole proprietor and master. But to-day he was too much absorbed in his own thoughts to be in the mood for business, and went straight home, with hardly a glance at the gates of his work-yard as he passed them on his way.

It was not a particularly pleasant or inviting home, this of Raymond Lee's.

That which he designated home was in fact nothing but a square formal-looking mansion, standing in a desolate garden where the few flowers that were planted obstinately refused to blossom, and approached by a narrow road running between dead walls, beyond which were wood-yards and tan-yards and dock-yards and work-shops and tall chimneys, with all the other ills that the unfashionable and low-lying suburb of a busy sea-port is heir to. The house itself was good enough in its way; but, as the chief object in building it had been that it might be near the gun factory, so, now that it was built, this was the chief recommendation it possessed. And the square formal-looking mansion, with the furniture and elderly housekeeper therein, constituted all that Raymond Lee called home, for of loving smiles or welcoming voices to greet him on his return to it there were none. But he had lived here for years, and, though it was not the abode that he might have chosen for himself, he did not think of changing it since circumstances had chosen it for him.

The master of the house did not live in the principal part of it, all the best apartments being shrouded by the housekeeper in brown holland and perpetual seclusion. A couple of rooms were reserved for his occupation at the back, a bed-room and small parlor. The latter was fitted up as library and study, the walls being lined with books, and the table covered with papers

and writing materials. Two objects only there were in the room not adapted for studious uses—one of them a little work-table standing by the window, and the other a small oil portrait for which space had been left between the bookshelves, the portrait of a gentle, sorrowful, broken-down looking woman, with worn features that showed traces of having once been beautiful.

It was the likeness of Raymond Lee's mother, and the work-table had been hers also.

It was toward this portrait that Raymond's eyes turned first as he entered his room to-day on his return from Hollsworth. The repayment to their rightful owners of the moneys stolen by her husband had been the most cherished desire of Mrs. Lee's heart; and, knowing how her poor faded features would have lighted up and thanked him had she been alive to hear from his lips that the task of restitution had that day been completed, he instinctively looked toward the imaged face which was all of her left to him. But no smile of loving approbation was there—only the patient expression of silent suffering which was never to be changed now—and he felt that he was alone in the world, alone with none to rejoice with him in his successes, or to sympathize with him in possible troubles. And, grave and self-possessed as he was, the feeling was very oppressive to him.

For he had not been intended by nature to go through life without a friend. What there was of gloom and sternness about him had not been always there, though circumstances had so ingrained it that it now seemed a part of himself.

Just at the age which perhaps does more than any other to form a young man's character—between eighteen and nineteen—the great blow of his life had fallen, driving him back upon himself at the time when a healthy nature is most sanguine and expansive, most confident of its own resources, most hungry for external sympathy. He had gone to Oxford full of high hopes and high spirits, indulging in splendid visions of scholarly success and reputation—for his tastes and ambition both pointed in that direction, and the family means were sufficient to secure to his abilities a fair field—when the fatal news came announcing the ruin of his prospects, and fixing the guilt of fraud and embezzlement on his father's name. From that day forth Raymond Lee was a changed character. The high hopes and high spirits were all gone—swept away in a revulsion of feeling too strong for them to stem—and instead of the candid, open-hearted, ambitious youth, there was a grave, reserved, austere man. His whole nature was soured by bitter disappointment and a yet more bitter sense of shame—or rather it would have been soured save for the love he bore his mother, a love which the consciousness of being her only stay and comforter rendered yet more tender and abundant. But toward all others whom he had known he had grown cold and reticent, perhaps even a little hard and cynical. His native pride made him sensitive, and it seemed to him that they all despised him for his father's misdeeds—probably some of them did—and therefore he held aloof from them, retreating, except for his mother, altogether within himself. Of his father he thought as little as he could, but, when he did, it was with peculiar bitterness. How else could he think of the man who, never

remembered as a kind or loving parent, had ended by breaking his mother's heart?

Thus had Raymond Lee, from a frank, high-spirited young man, become, if not exactly a misanthrope, very far indeed from a lover of his kind.

He had strict ideas of justice and duty—his loathing of his father's crime had made them almost morbid in their severity—but, while scrupulously rendering all men their legal due, he was often uncharitable and even unjust in his views of character and estimation of motives. He did not give the world proper credit for the good that was in it, and inclined to exaggerate its faults, its aptitude for cheating and betraying, its proneness to worship the exalted and forget the fallen. Had not his own father been a cheat and betrayer, and had not he himself suffered from the neglect that waits on sunken fortunes? As a matter of duty and moral obligation, he would have refused no man a service that reasonably lay within his power to confer, but he would have taken absolutely no pleasure in the act—unless indeed the person to be benefited belonged to a comparatively poor or helpless class, and then he would have performed it *con amore*. For it was his wont to think less harshly and judge less strictly of those below himself than of those who were his social equals; it was his social equals only who had possessed the power of wounding him by averted faces and altered looks.

Since the blasting of his youthful hopes, the circumstances of his life had been such as tended to confirm rather than undo the change which at that time had suddenly produced itself in his character. He and his mother had been left in complete destitution, and it was necessary for him to renounce all the prospects on which he had set his heart, to abandon the studies in which he took a passionate interest, and find some immediate means of supporting her and himself. An uncle, Mrs. Lee's brother, who was the proprietor of a large gun factory at St. Austin's, came forward at this juncture with an offer to receive Raymond into his establishment as a clerk, and to find room for mother and son in his own house. The proposal was eagerly accepted, and Raymond accommodated himself as best he could to the dull laborious clerk's life which at that time seemed the only one he had to look forward to, the factory and its handsome profits being destined for his uncle's son, then a mere boy and several years younger than himself. The business had little interest for one whose tastes were all studious, and his uncle was not the kind of man to make those happy on whom he felt that he was conferring a favor; but Raymond worked on steadily and uncomplainingly, with no other solace than an hour or two of the evening spent alone with his mother in the little back parlor which was considered specially theirs.

At last, after years of patient plodding, a prospect of new fortune was opened to him by the death of his cousin at a foreign university where he had been finishing his education—an event which left Raymond his uncle's only near relative, with the exception of Mrs. Lee herself. But the old man, though now intending to leave the business to his nephew, would not part with any of his own power by admitting him to a

present share in the profits, and the only advantage immediately accruing to Raymond was promotion to the post of manager at a lower salary than that for which any body else could have been induced to perform its duties. So that, even as his uncle's acknowledged heir, he was still under tutelage and control; and, with large wealth in prospect, had to chafe under the impossibility of doing any thing to fulfill the darling ambition of his mother and himself—the repayment of the sum of which his father had robbed the defunct Company.

It was a Quixotic idea enough, this which mother and son nursed in the solitude of their little back parlor, but people who lead a life cut off from the rest of the world are apt to be impractical in some of their notions. Be it what it might, they had both got the idea into their heads; and, although the feelings which had suggested it to the one were widely different from those with which it was adopted by the other, both cherished the hope of its realization with equal earnestness. Poor Mrs. Lee had a vague fancy that by an act of vicarious expiation it might be possible to lessen the guilt of the husband for whom she still felt a lingering tenderness; but with Raymond the desire to repair the wrongs suffered by his father's victims was an impatient protest against the heinousness of his father's crime, an impulse of indignation and disgust prompting him at any cost to thrust the stigma of reflected dishonor from his own and his mother's name. In the first days of their adversity, while he was still a youth, he had taken his resolution; and, his nature being a constant one, he had kept it steadily in view through all vicissitudes, never, even when his fortunes were at their darkest, despairing of its fulfillment.

That fulfillment the poor mother was not destined to witness. She had died a year or two before her brother, while Raymond's wealth was still only in prospect. By her death all the pleasure he might ever have had in anticipating his independence was utterly annihilated—he was left a lonely man, without a sympathizing friend, or even a congenial acquaintance. Since their misfortunes, he and his mother had lived together almost as hermits, shunning all society except their own, as though they had held themselves plague-smitten. So indeed Raymond had at first, perhaps not altogether without reason, believed that he and his would be regarded by the world, and had therefore shrunk with morbid susceptibility from confronting it. By the time that it was ready to receive him into favor as the future proprietor of one of the largest establishments of St. Austin's, he had contracted that habit of seclusion which is the most difficult of all others to shake off, steadily declining all overtures—and they were not a few—which were made to tempt him out of his retirement. Thus, when his mother died, he was left absolutely alone, unloved and unloving; and, in spite of the brilliant prospects which others envied him, he felt that only one object remained to him worth living for.

The opportunity of accomplishing that object arrived at last. Three or four months before the day of his visit to John Haroldson, Raymond's uncle had died, leaving him sole heir to the business and the wealth amassed by it; and his first act after entering into possession had

been to set apart from his capital the sum of twenty-five thousand pounds, which, as he had found by careful study of the Company's books, represented the total amount of his father's defalcations. This money he had distributed in due proportion among the shareholders or their representatives, John Haroldson being the last to receive his portion in consequence of his own strange remissness in neglecting to answer the notices repeatedly served upon him.

And now Raymond was able to erase the last item from the long list of claims which accurately and laboriously he had made out against himself. He had brought to final fulfillment that day the object which he had been proposing to himself for years, and he was satisfied, as how indeed could he be otherwise? But in his satisfaction he was strangely sad and heavy-hearted. He thought of her who would have shared it with him once, and as he entered with his achieved purpose into the little parlor where she no longer sat to welcome him, it seemed to him that it had never been so desolate. The very consciousness of having attained the end so long striven for increased his sense of depression. Hitherto, however dull and solitary had been his existence since the death of her in whom all his affections had been bound up, he had at least had something to live for, something to hope and wait for. But now by his very triumph his object was gone from him, and life stretched before him a dreary barren waste. The spring sunshine was smiling on the world without; in the fields and woods, even in his own unfertile garden, all nature, animate and inanimate, seemed to be vibrating with the hopes and joys of a new awakening; only for him, Raymond Lee, were the pleasures of life exhausted. Exhausted already, and he had scarcely tasted of them.

He was in general sufficiently equable of mood, but he could not help being painfully affected by the sense of utter loneliness and hopelessness which pressed on him to-day; and, as he sat dreamily gazing at the portrait which was the only substitute he had for human companionship, the gravity of his expression deepened into gloom.

So absorbed was he with sad and bitter meditation that he paid no heed to a hasty footstep that suddenly made itself heard outside his door, and even an impatient tap on the panels failed to rouse him. The tap was repeated, but with the same result, and then the door was flung open, and his housekeeper entered the room breathless and panting.

The noise she made in opening the door caught his ear at last, and without turning his head he asked almost mechanically—

"What is it?"

"Oh, sir! such a dreadful thing! An accident at the factory—something blowed up in the casting, I think they say it was—and one of the men hurt shockingly. And please, sir, you're wanted directly."

Raymond Lee sprang to his feet—he was transformed into the man of action at once.

"Have they sent for a doctor?" was the only question which he paused to put.

The housekeeper answered in the affirmative, and without interrogating her farther he hurried forth to the scene of the disaster.

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST SIGHT.

A FEW minutes brought him to the gates of the factory. He entered hastily, and hurried across the open space round which the workshops were built—dimly conscious of hearing a querulous female voice say something about a carriage, and of seeing a quantity of ribbons and laces fluttering in a corner of the yard, but too intent on learning the state of the injured workman to feel any curiosity as to the cause of so unwonted an apparition, or even to take a second look at it.

On reaching the shed where the accident had happened, he was relieved by finding that it was by no means so serious as he had feared. The sufferer, who was on the point of being carried to the hospital, had received a few superficial burns which caused great pain, but were not extensive enough to be dangerous; and a doctor already on the spot was able to hold out hopes that with proper treatment the patient might probably in a few weeks be at work again. The master gave what instructions he could to insure the poor fellow's comfort, and saw him started on his way to the hospital, remaining behind a few minutes himself to examine the scene of the accident and to inquire into its causes.

By this time Raymond had forgotten all about the ribbons and laces, and was a good deal surprised on coming out into the yard again to find them still fluttering in the corner where he had first caught a glimpse of them. They belonged, as he now had leisure to observe, to two ladies, one of whom, a good-looking portly matron, somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age, rested herself a little superciliously on a seat improvised out of a couple of logs of timber, holding a scent-bottle to her nose, and carrying on a low-voiced conversation with her companion. The latter was standing up close by, with her face turned toward the first lady, so that for Raymond the features were concealed; but her figure was slender and well-turned, and the tightly-gloved hand which carelessly swung a tiny lace-covered parasol had all the daintiness of youth and good-breeding.

"Them ladies were by when it happened, sir," explained a workman in answer to Raymond's inquiring glance. "They came with an order to go over the works, and had just gone in to have a look at the casting. And weren't they frightened neither? Lord bless us, I thought the old 'un would ha' gone into fits."

Raymond, who, to oblige a customer or business acquaintance, would occasionally sign an order for admitting to a view of his establishment a party of sight-seers of whom he might personally know nothing, had no idea who or what these visitors were, except indeed that they were total strangers to him. However, he felt bound to show some concern for ladies who on his premises had just been subjected to fright and even to considerable danger, and, going up to the elder, he said:

"I am sorry to hear you have been so much alarmed. You are neither of you hurt, I hope?"

"Not in one sense," returned the lady languidly, removing the scent-bottle for an instant from her face. "But in another dreadfully—indeed I don't know if ever I shall get over it. It has been altogether something so frightful!

When I saw that great sheet of flame rushing toward us, I never more expected to come out of the place alive" . . .

She paused, overcome by the reminiscence, and again had recourse to her vinaigrette. Raymond thought of the luckless workman who had come off so much worse than this elegant lady visitor, and remained unsympathetically silent.

"Yes, what with one thing and another, I am quite upset. I was beginning to revive a little two or three minutes ago, and would you believe it, they came and carried that poor creature past on a shutter—just a few yards from where I was sitting. Such a horrible sight—it made me quite ill again. I really think they might have had the feeling to go round by another way. Can you tell me any thing about my carriage?"

Raymond answered dryly that he could not, and was about to turn on his heel, quite disgusted with what he inwardly called the heartlessness of these dressed-out women of the world, when he was arrested by a soft voice, asking—

"And the poor man—what does the doctor say about him?"

The other lady was now the questioner, and as she spoke she turned her face for the first time toward Raymond. It was girlish and fair-complexioned, with deep blue eyes, delicately tinted cheeks, and a white forehead, over which there rippled a shining mass of wavy golden hair. A beautiful face it was—bright and sunny in its fresh clear loveliness; and so it appeared even now that it was shaded by an expression of sweet compassionate solicitude which made the deep blue eyes look more than usually earnest.

Raymond was taken altogether by surprise—he had expected neither the voice nor the face. A sense of momentary bewilderment came over him, such as one feels when dazzled by a burst of unlooked-for light, and he was conscious that he made an awkward pause before replying—

"The doctor's opinion is very favorable indeed. There will be a great deal of pain of course, but no real danger, he thinks."

"I am so glad," said the young lady gently. "Poor man! to think of his going through so much in the mean time! Mamma, is it not dreadful?"

"Very dreadful," said the matron. "My dear, mark my words—I shall suffer for this with one of my bad nervous headaches."

"I hope they will be very kind to him, poor fellow. Mamma, I wonder if" . . .

The sentence was finished in a whisper into the elder lady's ear.

"I shouldn't think there was any occasion, my dear—he is sure to be taken care of without that. Besides, I shall want my change to buy some eau de cologne as we pass—it is the only thing that does my head good."

"I have some money, mamma," said the young lady quickly, and her purse was already in her hand. "I should be very glad to give a trifle if you think it would contribute in any way to his comfort," she continued, looking at Raymond.

He had been busy wondering how such a daughter should have come of such a mother, and absolutely started when he found the fair face turned toward him for an answer.

"No, no, all that is the duty of the employer," he replied a little confusedly. "And you may be sure it will not be neglected."

Indeed it would not, for, as he spoke, he felt that his promise to the young lady constituted an obligation hardly less binding than his duty to the poor workman.

"There, my dear, I told you so," said the mamma. "But you are always so impetuous—it is just like you. And you really have heard nothing about my carriage?" she went on, addressing Raymond.

"I really have not," he answered with some coldness. He paused; then, after a glance at the young lady, resumed more politely—"I am sorry you should be put to inconvenience. Can I make any inquiries for you?"

"Oh no! thank you—we have a gentleman who has gone to manage for us. You see we sent the carriage away for two hours, being told it took that time to go over the works, but of course after what has happened I am fit for nothing except to get home as soon as possible. The man is driving up and down somewhere near, I am sure, and the gentleman is gone to find him, but I am looking in the wrong place, I suppose, as usual. I never knew such a bad one as your papa is to look for any thing, did you, my love? And it is so cold and miserable, waiting in this horrid place by ourselves."

During the greater part of this speech Raymond had hardly been conscious that he was addressed, his eyes having again involuntarily wandered toward the young lady. He recalled his attention with an effort, just in time to catch the last words, and then it suddenly occurred to him that this open yard was not the place for softly bred ladies to be kept waiting in.

"It is not right for you to be standing here," he said eagerly. "Will you not come into the office and sit down?"

The invitation was addressed to the elder lady, but it was the young one only who was standing.

"Thank you," was the answer, "I think we will. Come, Minna, there is no knowing how much longer your papa may keep us waiting."

Raymond led the way across the court to the dingy one-storied brick building which contained the counting-house and private offices. Passing through the former, where a couple of clerks were sitting at work, he went up to a door which communicated with an inner room.

"Oh dear! shan't we be intruding?" said the elder lady, pausing with a simper as she caught sight of the inscription on the brass name-plate.

"It is Mr. Lee's own room, I see, and I know he does not like company."

"He will not object," said Raymond briefly.

He saw that she took him for one of his own subordinates, and was a little vexed as he thought that her companion probably shared the error, but was too proud, and perhaps also too awkward, to correct it.

"What a dark dismal little room!" remarked the lady of the vinaigrette as she sank exhausted on the first chair which presented itself.

Raymond looked round. Yes, the room was dark certainly; the window was small, and there were buildings outside which partially intercepted the light. He had often enough thought it dark himself, and remembered the time when it had chafed him sorely to be condemned day after day to sit at work in it. And yet it did not look exactly dark just now.

"It is a funny little place, to be sure," said the

young lady, taking a rapid survey with her bright blue eyes. "Dreadfully grim and business-like, is it not? And oh! mamma, what a woful lookout! That great oppressive dead wall—I wonder if it leaves a morsel of blue sky visible."

She steered her way round the high desk to the window, her silks and ribbons rustling against the heavy office furniture like the plumage of a beautiful bird against the bars of a cage too small for it.

"Only the least little scrap," she pronounced, as she looked up dolefully. "How can any one endure it, I wonder?"

Raymond Lee stood by and watched the while.

It was a strange sensation for him to see this bright fair-haired girl peering and prying about his room, with which she looked almost as much out of keeping as a butterfly which might have perversely strayed into its musty fastnesses from far-away flower pastures. The gloomy chamber which was so dreadfully familiar to him seemed to change its aspect altogether as she fluttered round it—so entirely that, though he recognized every separate piece of furniture and other such detail, he felt as though the place were altogether new and fresh to him, and could not help wondering a little sadly whether with her departure it would again become dull and prosaic as formerly. Once and once only the dark office-parlor had looked pleasant to him before, when his mother had come to pay him a visit there, and made it seem friendly and home-like by the mere fact of her presence; but in the natural course of things the charm had long ago been rubbed off again by hours of solitary uncheered toil. Still the apparition of to-day was so very bright and unreal-looking that it was difficult, while it lasted, to believe in the natural course of things. When one sees a sunbeam dancing on a landscape hitherto known only in cloudy weather, the change is so great that one can hardly imagine the scene given back to sunlessness.

"I hope you feel better now, mamma," said the young lady, bringing her peregrinations to a close by settling herself on an antiquated horse hair arm-chair near the window. As she dropped into it, Raymond remembered that it was the same on which his mother had sat the day he had entertained her here, and, without knowing why, felt pleased that the young lady had chosen it.

"A little better now," was the languishing response. "But I don't know what I should have done if I had not been accommodated with a seat in-doors."

"We have been very fortunate," said the young lady, and she smiled softly toward Raymond, as though thanking him.

How wonderfully bright and beaming that smile was! It had been so entirely unexpected that he was a little confused, but managed to stammer forth in answer—

"I am very glad to have been of service to you."

In saying this, however, he stupidly looked at the younger lady instead of the elder, and consequently received a reply from neither.

For some moments there was a pause, which did not appear to embarrass the two ladies, but which Raymond felt to be very awkward. Quite unconscious that they were receiving his hospitalities, they evidently did not consider themselves

under any obligation to enter into conversation with him, while for his part he was too little a man of the world to know how to make a beginning without assistance. It would have been easy for him of course to go away and leave them to themselves; as was probably expected of him, but somehow he did not care for going away just then.

He was presently helped out of his dilemma in a way he had not expected. One of the clerks who had been writing in the other room put in his head to announce—

"Oh! if you please, sir, here's a gentleman come to say that the carriage is waiting."

And through the half-open door Raymond saw a tall, bald-headed, gray-whiskered gentleman, with whom he had occasionally had dealings in the way of business, and who, as he now remembered, had asked the other day for an order to admit himself and two ladies to view the factory.

"How do you do, Mr. Fanshawe?" said Raymond, more cordially than he had ever greeted that gentleman before. "Step this way, please; the ladies are resting in my room for a few minutes."

"Ah! Mr. Lee, is it you? How do?" And with two fingers extended, being the warmest salutation he was ever known to bestow on any one, Mr. Fanshawe entered the room where Raymond had accommodated his visitors.

"Mr. Lee!" exclaimed the elder lady, and she turned toward Raymond with a look of unfeigned surprise. "So it has actually been Mr. Lee himself whom we have had the pleasure of speaking to all this time! I had no idea—had you, Minna? Henry, my dear, pray make Mr. Lee acquainted with us."

"It is my wife, you know," said Mr. Fanshawe, looking very much embarrassed by the task laid on him. "Mr. Lee—Mrs. and Miss Fanshawe."

And, having thus gracefully acquitted himself, he eagerly subsided into his native obscurity.

"We have to thank you so very much for your kindness," went on Mrs. Fanshawe to Raymond in her most friendly tones. "I don't know what would have become of us without you—really I don't."

Raymond bowed gravely—his natural staidness of demeanor rarely allowed him to appear other than quiet and composed.

"You have nothing to thank me for—I am only sorry to have been able to do so little."

"Nothing to thank you for!" cried Mrs. Fanshawe, holding up her finger in playful remonstrance. "As if I did not know what a privilege it is to be admitted into your own private room! And we were sadly in the way, I fear—ladies always are. Did you not find us so, Mr. Lee? Now speak the truth."

"Indeed not—I assure you," said Raymond, in a tone of more earnestness than seemed necessary, but he was looking at the younger lady as he spoke, and felt strangely anxious to rebut the imputation.

"Well, it is very kind of you to say so. And to think we never so much as thanked you—it must have seemed terribly rude. But it is your own fault, you know; you never give your neighbors an opportunity of making your acquaintance, and cannot expect to be recognized. Why do you make such a hermit of yourself?"

"It is half-past three," murmured Mr. Fanshawe timidly from a corner. "And I have an appointment at four."

"I am coming, Henry; but I must first try to make Mr. Lee promise that he will let us see him occasionally. Now you will, Mr. Lee, won't you?"

"I never go into company," said Raymond, half mechanically. This was the stereotyped answer which he made to all such overtures, and he made it now according to his rule, but even as the words passed his lips he half regretted that his rule was so very absolute.

"Oh! but I won't hear of any excuses. Come, Mr. Lee, it isn't fair, really, that you should not give us an opportunity of returning your hospitalities. After the pleasant morning we have spent here—at least I don't mean that, for of course it has been very dreadful and heart-rending, but it would have been pleasant, you know, under other circumstances—after all the kindness you have shown us, I should say—it would be positively shabby to withdraw and never let yourself be seen or heard of again. You must fix a day for coming to us, upon my word you must. Now when do you think will suit you best? We are expecting a few friends to dinner this week on—let me see, what day, my love?"

"The day after to-morrow," said the young lady. "It will be Wednesday, you know."

She half turned her head toward Raymond as she added this explanation. The movement seemed almost unconscious, but he could not help noticing it, and feeling that she had endorsed the invitation.

"Yes, Wednesday—you are quite right, dear. Will that suit you, Mr. Lee? Come, I am sure you can't object—it is to be quite a quiet, friendly affair—only three or four besides ourselves. You can't say no to that, can you?"

He could neither say no nor yes for a few moments. It was such an unheard-of thing with him to go to a dinner-party, that it seemed out of the question to accept, and yet, when he came to think of it, he did not exactly know why he should not. In his indecision he glanced in the direction of the young lady. She had been looking toward him, and for an instant their eyes met.

"Well?" persisted Mrs. Fanshawe. "Silence gives consent, and you will come, won't you?"

"You are very kind," he replied with an effort. "As you wish it, I will."

"An appointment at four," groaned Mr. Fanshawe despairingly.

"Very well, Henry, I am quite ready. Good-bye, Mr. Lee—we shall be so delighted to see you. Seven o'clock on Wednesday—don't forget."

Raymond shook his head and smiled. He did not say it, but he knew that the sense of being under an engagement to a dinner-party was a great deal too novel and too oppressive to admit of forgetfulness.

Mrs. Fanshawe gathered the folds of her shawl around her, and the rustling silks and gauzy tissues which for a while had filled Raymond's room with incongruous brightness fluttered out of it again. He did not stay behind to contemplate the effect of their disappearance, but followed the ladies to their carriage, which was waiting for them at the factory gates. Here

a friendly farewell was said, Mrs. Fanshawe shaking hands with her new acquaintance very warmly, and the young lady following her example, though a little timidly and undecidedly. And yet his fingers retained the sensation of her light touch longer than that of Mrs. Fanshawe's cordial grasp. Then there was a great deal of packing and adjustment of drapery, and a great deal of smoothing and shaking out of lace trimmings; but at last, to Mr. Fanshawe's infinite satisfaction, the whole party was safely stowed, and the carriage rolled off, leaving Raymond to look after it and wonder what infatuation had taken hold of him that he stood committed to a dinner-party on Wednesday.

"Well, I am quite pleased he is coming," said Mrs. Fanshawe, as soon as they were in motion. "I think we have made a real acquisition, eh, my dear?"

"I don't know—I suppose so," said Minna carelessly, twiddling with the tassel of her parasol.

"And we may take it as a wonderful compliment that he did not refuse point-blank. I never heard of his going into company before. Though I know several people who have tried to get him to their parties, but he has always held back. How surprised they will be when they hear of his being at our house! It is really something extraordinary."

"What an odd person he must be!" said Minna, readjusting the tassel, which she had nearly pulled off.

"He must be rather eccentric, I suppose, but it does not show so much as you might expect. I had always imagined him to be a kind of barbarian, or I should not have been so long to-day in finding out who he was. It was rather stupid of us, though, for he is much too gentlemanly for a clerk or any thing of that kind. You thought him very gentlemanly, didn't you?"

"Oh yes! he was gentlemanly," said Minna indifferently, as though referring to something in the far-away past which had altogether ceased to interest her.

"He is good-looking too," said Mrs. Fanshawe, with a critical air. "Yes—for a man—decidedly good-looking."

There was a pause, but Minna did not take the opportunity of making a remark.

"I suppose he is very well off," went on the lady, looking at her husband. "His business is first-rate, I believe?"

"First-rate," said Mr. Fanshawe with an unwonted gleam of enthusiasm. "Wonderful paying concern—quite wonderful—and lots of ready money. Why, he paid away thirty thousand the other day as if it had been so much water—money he didn't owe a farthing of. Very unbusiness-like, you know."

"Oh yes! I heard about that—something connected with that horrid father of his, wasn't it? An honorable feeling on his part, no doubt, though I can't see myself that there was any call for such a thing. But the fact of his being able to afford it shows he must be very rich."

"He is rich," said Mr. Fanshawe emphatically. "Pretty near the richest man in St. Austin's, I should think."

Still Minna made no remark. But secretly she was very glad to hear what Mr. Fanshawe thought.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE THE GLASS.

MRS. FANSHAWE'S adopted daughter—Minnie Haroldson formerly, Minna Fanshawe now—was at this time just twenty-one years of age.

The promise of her childhood had been more than fulfilled, and Miss Fanshawe was by common consent the reigning beauty of St. Austin's. But to the surprise of all her friends and acquaintances, she remained Miss Fanshawe still; and, in spite of numerous admirers, had completed her twenty-first year without pledging her hand to any of them.

The truth was she, and Mrs. Fanshawe for her, could afford to be fastidious, and, knowing it, felt themselves in no kind of hurry. If Minna's heart had been touched, she might not perhaps have been able to be so solidly sensible in her views, but hitherto it had been altogether quiescent in the matter. When a girl is brought up to see a great deal of society, especially if she is beautiful and early seasoned to adulation, she is not apt to surrender her affections to the first comer. It is the plain girls, those to whom a soft word or lover-like attention is as manna in the wilderness, who are most given to be romantically impressible; and even in their case susceptibility gets its edges wonderfully rubbed off by contact with the world and the habit of seeing a constant succession of new faces. So that Minna, thoroughly versed in society and accustomed from childhood to receive admiration as her right, was comparatively safe against having her head turned by the homage of an individual adorer, and had passed fancy-free and heart-whole through the fire of innumerable sieges. And being thus under no interior compulsion or impulse, she was content to wait before making her selection.

Mrs. Fanshawe preferred to wait also. She was determined that when Minna married it should be somebody whom all the mothers of St. Austin's should envy her for having secured as a son-in-law, and no one had yet presented himself who in her eyes came quite up to the prescribed standard of eligibility. Nor did she much regret the delay. Naturally she was not very impatient to part with any share in the adopted daughter whom she had been at so much pains to obtain, and whose companionship had proved the most effectual cure for *ennui* she had ever tried; and indeed she would probably not have endured the notion of any change in the present state of things save for the spirit of rivalry inspired by the example of others. But she looked round and saw other mothers of marriageable daughters busy in disposing of their girls to the best advantage, and felt that she would be eternally disgraced if she did not succeed as well for her beautiful Minna as the most skillful and fortunate chaperon of them all. And thus it was a settled thing in Mrs. Fanshawe's mind that, though there was no particular hurry about it, Minna should one day make a match of peculiar excellence.

Without any spoken explanation or overt interchange of ideas, Mrs. Fanshawe's views on this subject were fully understood and fully entered into by the young lady herself. That she should in due time marry, and marry well, was a thesis which, though she had never enunciated it or

heard it enunciated, Minna never dreamed of doubting. Not that she cumbered herself greatly about the matter, but thus much she took for granted simply because she never thought of contemplating the possibility of any thing different. Other young ladies got married, or else were pitied for not getting married; and, as the idea of being pitied was not to be harbored in Minna's mind for an instant, it followed that she would get married too. Then, as to the high external qualifications of her future husband, whoever he was to be, they were equally a matter of course. Other young ladies tried to secure for themselves by their marriage as much wealth and as good a position as possible, their success being usually in the ratio of their own attractiveness; and Minna, having reasons to know that her attractiveness was very great, could not doubt that her success would be proportionately splendid.

Perhaps it showed a want of originality of intellect that she never asked herself if this kind of success would really be most conducive to her happiness, but Minna did not set up to be an original thinker, and it had not occurred to her to consider the question. She knew the kind of marriage that would be pronounced by family and friends a "good match," knew that she was expected to make a good match, and never thought of doing otherwise. The possibility of marrying a poor man and being happy with him had never entered her head in her wildest moods of speculation; and if it had, she would forthwith have dismissed the notion as a hypothetical infraction of her duty to society, to herself, and to the adopted mother who had rescued her from poverty as a brand from the burning. For though Minna's love for Mrs. Fanshawe unwittingly fell far short of that which a child ought to bear toward a parent, she had a great idea of how much she owed her. Often when she saw a girl of her own age shabbily dressed and under-educated, she would almost shudder to think that this might have been her case too, and would inwardly feel very grateful to dear mamma.

It will be seen that Minna loved the world and the good things thereof. But then she had been taught to love them, and must not be too harshly judged for having learned her lesson. And, whatever her faults were, she was not altogether without virtues. If she was worldly, she was not heartless—though these are adjectives which usually go together. She had learned to be a fine lady, and to prefer purple and fine linen to serge and fustian; but she had not learned to be selfish or cold-blooded, and would have dressed all mankind in purple and fine linen if she could, without stopping to inquire by what hands the future manufacture of those becoming fabrics was to be carried on. She was fundamentally good-natured, and not even the long course of spoiling she had undergone had been able to make her otherwise. Her very attachment to her own privileges rendered her pitiful and tender-hearted toward those who could not share them. She was of the earth, earthy, in her exaggerated appraisement of the wealth and refinement which had fallen to her lot—fancying indeed that life must be a kind of blank without them—but she would have been willing and glad that all the world should be as affluent and refined as herself; and she had this of Heaven in her, that she had

a heart always ready to be moved with a tale of distress.

On the day appointed for Raymond Lee's first appearance in the Fanshawe mansion, Minna dressed for dinner with peculiar care, showing such indecision as to which color and material best became her, and such fastidiousness in the disposition of her hair, as to render her maid's task much more than usually difficult. And even when her assistant had departed and her toilet was nominally complete, she was not content without a readjustment of its ornamental adjuncts, trying on one set of jewels after another, holding her pretty head first on this side to judge the effect of the emeralds, and then on that to catch the flash of the brilliants, and altogether looking a very image of perplexed deliberation.

At last she believed that she had found the exact kind and degree of decoration which best suited her; and, satisfied that the art of personal adornment could no farther go, let one hand fall negligently by her side, and held the other slightly lifted with a lace handkerchief gracefully pendent from it, and stood before her glass in complacent contemplation, as a painter before his favorite picture.

For Minna was not one of the young ladies, if indeed such there be, who, possessing charms, are unconscious of them. She was beautiful and vain of her beauty—that is to say, she valued it highly; perhaps unduly, as she valued other glittering externals. But if in this she erred, she erred in common with a countless multitude of others, and with a better excuse than many. Had she not an instinctive sense that her beauty had procured her the favor of her aunt and set her in the position dear to her? and was she not warned by the same instinctive sense, that, her beauty lost, the tenure on which she held her other privileges would be, if not destroyed, at least sadly weakened?

She had always known herself to be beautiful and been glad of it, but to-day she seemed more glad of it than usual. A soft happy flush mantled on her cheeks as she gazed, which could hardly have been caused by any amount of mere self-admiration. And indeed, though more than ordinarily interested in her mirror just now, it was not altogether of herself and her beauty that she was thinking. If she had put her thoughts into words and uttered them as they arose (but she would not have been heard talking such nonsense for the world), they would have run something in this strain—

"I am looking very well to-day—really very well indeed. He will think so too, if he has any eyes at all. He is sure to come—oh! of course he will come—he doesn't seem like a person who would break his word. Yes, uncommonly well, certainly—so much better than the other day with that dowdy bonnet. I don't think I will ever enter the woman's shop again—she had no business to give me those common flowers. But they say men don't observe things of that sort—very likely he never saw them. How stupid he must be! Then perhaps he won't notice how beautiful my white arm looks with the coral bracelet. Well, never mind; it will help the general effect. And so he is actually coming to dine with us—he who never was known to accept an invitation in his life before. 'I never go into company;' those were his very

words. And it is quite true, for we never met him anywhere. Very strange that he is coming really. It can't be to please papa; he is too rich to care about pleasing any body—the richest man in St. Austin's, papa said. And yet there must be some reason, one would think. I wonder what it is."

And then the soft flush on her cheeks grew deeper, and her bright lips parted in a self-conscious smile. She had made a theory of her own as to the reason, and the theory pleased her.

As has already been said, Minna had not hitherto shown herself susceptible, but in Raymond Lee she was undeniably interested. He had been the means of gratifying her vanity, and of gratifying it in an altogether new way. She had heard her praises spoken, till praises palled upon her ear; she had seen herself followed and worshiped by young ball-room dandies, till her appetite for their admiration was cloyed. But she had never yet seen what she saw now—a staid mature man (he looked almost middle-aged to her), of reserved tastes and demeanor (dreadfully stern she inwardly pronounced him), break through a life-long habit for the sake of a few hours of her society. The idea that she was the cause of so extraordinary a revolution as that implied in Raymond Lee's promised appearance at a dinner-party was a new sensation; and its novelty reacted in his favor by making her think of him with an interest she had never yet felt in any one, and look forward to his coming with strange inquisitive expectancy. She wanted to see him again, and find out whether he was really so grave and thoughtful as he had seemed the other day; above all, she wanted to know how he would bear himself in her presence and what he would say to her.

But the dinner hour had nearly struck, and it was time to put an end to this pleasant communion with her mirror. She threw off her reverie with somewhat of an effort, and having once more satisfied herself that nothing was wanting to the completeness of her toilet, turned away and issued from her room—a warrior armed cap-a-pie bound for the field of battle.

There were some half dozen people sitting and standing in the drawing-room as she entered, but Raymond Lee was not yet among them—she knew that at once, even before she had time to take note of those actually present.

As Mrs. Fanshawe had said, the party was to be a very small one, and with the exception of Raymond it was already assembled. The Fanshawes seldom gave dinner-parties, Minna having all a young lady's aversion to such ponderous festivities; and when they did, which was generally when Mr. Fanshawe wanted to please some business friend, it was almost always on a small scale. To-day it was a Mr. and Mrs. Hodgetts who, from Mr. Fanshawe's point of view, were the principal guests, and in whose honor the party had been originally proposed—Mr. Hodgetts being a sleepy-looking man of the heavy-father type, and Mrs. Hodgetts a stout well-meaning lady in amber-colored satin, who was decidedly not good style, but who was just tolerated in the Fanshawe circle for the sake of her husband. To talk to Mr. Hodgetts a Mr. Tomlinson had been invited—a gentleman in the heavy-father line also, whose chief charac-

teristics were plenty of hard cash and a turn for enunciating with peculiar unction gloomy views on financial and all other matters. Then, to counterbalance all this coarse commercial element and give a flavoring of fashionable refinement to the gathering, it had been considered necessary to secure the company of Mrs. Vesey and her daughter, the latter now developed into a tall dashing girl of some three or four-and-twenty.

It was not often indeed now that Mrs. Fanshawe had a party which was not graced by these ladies, they receiving the material advantages of unlimited ice and champagne in return for the aristocratic sanction imparted to an entertainment by their presence. It is true that there was not much love lost between the two matrons, or the two young ladies either for that matter; but each set was useful to the other, and each deemed it desirable to keep up the appearance of a friendship a good deal warmer than was really felt. The task was difficult occasionally on both sides. Mrs. Vesey's temper had suffered by years of painful striving to get the greatest possible amount of show out of small and gradually diminishing means; while Arabella's, poor thing, had been soured by a succession of matrimonial disappointments; and the spectacle of Mrs. Fanshawe's easy affluence and Minna's uncared-for conquests was sometimes almost too much for them. At such seasons they were apt to take viperish pleasure in remembering their own superior social status (for Mrs. Vesey still managed to retain a sort of footing in exclusive county society where the merchants and merchants' wives of St. Austin's were yet scarcely recognized), and gave themselves airs of patronizing condescension which galled dear Mrs. and Miss Fanshawe not a little. Under these provocations Mrs. Fanshawe kept her temper admirably, all things considered; but as for Minna, she was often on the point of open rebellion, and in spite of all her good-nature was conscious of disliking her friends very intensely.

On entering the drawing-room to-day, Minna seated herself by Mrs. Vesey because a chair happened to be so placed that she could not have avoided taking it without rudeness. But she had not been conversing with that lady five minutes when she made an excuse for getting away again, and presently she had glided up to where Mrs. Fanshawe sat talking to Mrs. Hodgetts.

"Mamma," whispered Minna, taking advantage of a pause in the conversation, and Mrs. Fanshawe knew from the tone of her voice that she had come to disburden herself of a grievance.

"What is it, my darling?" was the sympathizing response, unheard by Mrs. Hodgetts, who had fortunately become interested in some very dispiriting remarks of Mr. Tomlinson on prevailing meteorological influences.

"Oh! mamma, that horrid Mrs. Vesey! No, don't look at her, or she will know we are talking of her, and I couldn't bear her to imagine that she has vexed me. What do you think? She has been asking me if we are invited to Lady Fitz-John's *fête*, and then pretending to be so sorry that she won't have the pleasure of meeting us."

"Nasty creature!" commented Mrs. Fanshawe, a little more emphatically than usual, for

the entertainment in question was one to which she had made great interest to be invited, and not without some faint hopes of success. "Then does she mean to say that the invitations are issued already?"

"Of course," answered Minna pettishly, "and is boasting at no allowance of having got one for herself and Arabella. And oh! mamma, it is so provoking."

"It is strange, certainly," said Mrs. Fanshawe musingly. "But never mind, dear, where there are so many to ask, the invitations can't be all made out at once, you know. There is plenty of time still—more than three weeks yet. I believe Lady Fitz-John makes out the list of guests herself, and I should say that on such an occasion, when every body is anxious to welcome home the young heir, a mother would be very careful how she created invidious feeling by omitting any family of the slightest local importance."

And Mrs. Fanshawe drew herself up as if she thought her importance was very great, and almost more than local.

"Mrs. Vesey must have been very sure of her ground before she asked the question," said Minna ruefully. "Horrid, spiteful thing—she would never have wanted to know if she had thought there was a chance of our going. Oh! mamma, is it not?" . . .

She stopped suddenly, conscious that the door had just been thrown open, and that on the threshold appeared a tall dark figure which was that of Raymond Lee.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOCIETY.

YEARS had passed since last Raymond Lee had entered a room where guests were assembled; and though he knew himself to be sufficiently familiar with social usages to be in no danger of committing any specially glaring solecism, he was aware of an inner confusion and perturbation which no one would have suspected under his calm and composed exterior. His brain was, as it were, in a whirl, and there was a kind of haze before all his senses which prevented him from being more than dimly conscious of mechanically advancing amid a hum of voices to shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe, and with a radiant creature in bright apparel from whom all the light in the room seemed to emanate, and whom it appeared absurdly prosaic to call or even to think of as Miss Fanshawe.

His thoughts had been in strange turmoil for the last two days. He could hardly understand his own acceptance of Mrs. Fanshawe's invitation, and had hesitated almost up to the last moment whether he would not after all do well to get out of the engagement with an excuse, and to forget the episode of the other day as a foolish dream out of all harmony with the waking conditions of his life. But then he remembered—and the remembrance came as a bright and welcome suggestion—that the conditions of his life now were other than they had been. He had kept out of society hitherto because he had felt ashamed of showing his face in it; but now that

he had marked his abhorrence of his father's misdeeds by taxing himself to repair them, what cause had he to feel ashamed more? So far as he had been disgraced by what was never fault of his, the disgrace was wiped out now by his own voluntary act of reparation; and he was free, if so it pleased him, to resume his rightful place in the world. Since those outstanding six hundred pounds had been paid to John Haroldson, he had been the equal of other men, free to go where they went, to do as they did, ay, if he chose, to compete with them on even terms for any the highest prize he might feel a mind to win. And, arguing thus, he had decided to go to Mrs. Fanshawe's dinner, partly as an act of self-assertion, partly out of a strange undefinable curiosity to see more of the bright butterfly creature whose gay wings had whisked so inconspicuously the other day through his dull office-parlor.

And now he was actually in her presence again, and found its effect still the same, making him feel dizzy and bewildered, as though dazzled with excess of light.

Presently—before it was necessary for him to say more than the few matter-of-course words of greeting which rose mechanically to his lips—there was a general rustling of ladies' dresses and creaking of gentlemen's boots; and Raymond, still in a kind of dream, found himself going into the next room with a lady on his arm who had been introduced to him as Mrs. Vesey. He had lost sight of Minna for the time being, nor did he find her again at the dinner-table, where he took his seat between his hostess on the one hand and Mrs. Vesey on the other, with a row of unknown faces fronting him. But soon he heard a low silvery laugh sounding from his own side of the table two or three places farther down, and he knew that the light-beaming presence was not far off.

He was conscious of nothing at first save this fact, and the disagreeable prevalence of an inarticulate noise compounded of the buzz of tongues and the tinkle of knives and forks. But gradually, as the novelty of the situation wore off, the Babel of sounds began to resolve itself into separate and distinguishable elements, and he was able to follow with tolerable exactness what was being said.

It was a pity that he listened, for in a very few minutes he became disgusted and even angry with every member of the party save one. He had been so long out of the world that he had forgotten how difficult it is to keep up a conversation among casual acquaintances which to an attentive critic, especially if he be one who himself takes little or no part in it, shall not sound supremely shallow and inane. He forgot that it was necessary for those people to say something, and almost equally necessary that they should choose some subject of common interest—the fashions or a small bit of social gossip for the ladies, the funds or the rate of discount for the gentlemen, the weather as an occasional rallying-point for both sexes; and he was too mercilessly sweeping and bitter in his inferences as to the empty-headedness and empty-heartedness implied in the selection of themes and the mode of treatment.

The more he listened the more the misanthropical spirit of censorship was stirred, and, with his

contempt for the meanness and narrowness of soul which to his thinking nearly every remark betrayed, his indignation waxed also. The latter feeling was unreasonable, doubtless, but he could not help it when he thought how the prate of those material-minded worldlings must sound in the ears of the pure ethereal being whom he could not see, but whose voice occasionally reached him like a breath of soft music. It seemed to him a kind of profanation that this sordid, frivolous small-talk should be going on in the presence of her whom he knew to be sitting yonder in all the glory of her clear sunny beauty—her who was so manifestly different from the rest in the unworldly freshness of her nature that the only wonder was how she could have grown up among them. For the very bitterness of his scorn and almost hatred for the others tended but to brighten the ideal to which they served as foil; and Minna never looked to Raymond so nearly perfection as now when he sat fuming with silent contempt and dislike for her friends and family.

Surely if they could have known his feelings, the Hodgetts and Veseys and the rest of them would have had great cause to complain of the unjust partiality of his judgments. The conversation was certainly not very brilliant or improving, but neither in point of morality nor of intellect was it conspicuously below the average of dinner discourse in general; while the slight share contributed to it by Miss Fanshawe would hardly have suggested to an unbiased listener that there was any particular profanity perpetrated by holding it in her presence. Take, as an example, the last quarter of an hour which preceded the withdrawal of the ladies, and it can not be said that Raymond heard any thing to justify the state of suppressed wrath and indignation into which he had lashed himself.

MRS. FANSHAW. Well, I never thought her pretty, did you?

MRS. VESEY. Decidedly plain, in my opinion.

MRS. FANSHAW. She called the other day in one of those new-shaped bonnets. I suppose it did not become her, for I thought her looking so old.

MRS. VESEY. She can't be very young now, you know.

MR. FANSHAW. The last quotation was twenty-eight to twenty-eight and a half.

MR. TOMLINSON. You'll see it won't be above twenty-three next time. Such things are sure to come down with a run.

MRS. HODGETTS. Do you like the new shape?

MRS. FANSHAW. I hardly know; so much depends on the trimming.

UNSEEN DIVINITY. Well, for my part, I like all the fashions this season. And as for the new color, I am quite charmed with it.

MR. TOMLINSON. Mark my words, it won't last. My opinion is...

MRS. HODGETTS. Law now, Mr. Tomlinson, do you really think it won't? I've been told it was so wonderfully fast.

MR. TOMLINSON. (*Looking at her sternly in resentment of the interruption.*) I was referring to the present unexampled activity of tallow.

MRS. HODGETTS. Tallow! Ugh! how nasty! About the new color, as I was saying, the only objection to it is, it don't become all complexions.

MR. TOMLINSON. It will drop—see if it don't drop.

MR. FANSHAWE. Looks firm for the present, though. Help yourself, Mr. Hodgetts.

MR. HODGETTS. Thank you, I don't mind if I do. Good port this.

MR. TOMLINSON. Very fair, very fair. (*Holding his glass up with an air of satisfaction.*) Do you know they say that after five years more there won't be another drop imported?

MR. HODGETTS. (*Startled.*) How so, how so?

MR. TOMLINSON. Something wrong in the vines, they say. Yes (*with increased cheerfulness*), it's a bad lookout, but you may take my word it is the deficiency of ozone that is at the bottom of it all. My belief is that a gradual deterioration of the atmosphere is taking place everywhere. Look at the weather to-day, you can't call it natural, can you?

MRS. FANSHAWE. Well, it has been rather warm for the time of year, certainly.

MRS. VESEY. Very fatiguing weather I call it. And Arabella and I have so much to do just now—I can't tell you how tired we are. We were at St. Cecilia's Hall all morning superintending the arrangements.

MRS. HODGETTS. The bazaar is to be the day after to-morrow, isn't it?

MRS. VESEY. Yes, and you can't imagine how many little things there are to be thought of now that the time is so near. I am sure if it was not in the hope of doing some trifle of good, nothing would induce me to undertake a stall—nothing. I am quite worn out, and so is that poor girl, are you not, dear?

MISS VESEY. (*Smiling faintly, and pressing her hand for an instant on her brow to still its throbbing.*) It is of no consequence, dear mamma. Only a bad headache.

MR. HODGETTS. A capital investment, depend upon it. One of the best things going.

UNSEEN DIVINITY. I suppose it will be a very gay affair.

MR. FANSHAWE. Five-and-twenty per cent.

MRS. VESEY. Oh! every body will be there. Those little hand-screens of yours look so nice, Miss Fanshawe. I expect to have quite a crowd of competitors for them.

MR. TOMLINSON. Very fine, very fine, but what do you call the security?

UNSEEN DIVINITY. I think the design is rather pretty. Mrs. Wilks saw them before they were sent off, and was so pleased with them that I have had to do another pair just like them for her stall.

MRS. VESEY. Poor Mrs. Wilks! what an odd person she is! (*Turning to RAYMOND graciously.*) You are going to patronize us, I hope, Mr. Lee?

RAYMOND. (*Stiffly.*) Patronize you! In what way?

MRS. VESEY. Why, the bazaar, to be sure. Oh! Mr. Lee, you can't mean to say you don't know about the bazaar.

MR. HODGETTS. The last transaction was at a hundred and thirty.

RAYMOND. I never heard of it till this evening.

MRS. VESEY. Not the bazaar to be held at St. Cecilia's Hall next Friday and Saturday in aid of the Conversion of Old-Clothesmen in the Metropolis Fund? Well, Mr. Lee, you do surprise me. But you will go, won't you?

RAYMOND. Certainly not.

MRS. VESEY. Not? And why?

RAYMOND. My best reason is that I do not approve of bazaars.

MRS. VESEY. Oh fie! Mr. Lee—what harm did they ever do you?

RAYMOND. No harm to me, but no good to any body else. They are a machinery for getting pleasure under false pretenses, and false pretenses are never right.

MR. FANSHAWE. Up at a premium just now.

MRS. VESEY. False pretenses—what hard names! But surely, Mr. Lee, if there is a way of combining one's own pleasure with the benefit of others, it must be so much the better, must it not?

RAYMOND. Not at all; juggling with charity and amusement is not so much the better, but so much the worse. It can't be good to treat the act of helping a poor neighbor as a pill which has to be sugared over before it is palatable.

MRS. VESEY. A pill! He! he! how funny! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hodgetts—you were speaking to me?

MRS. HODGETTS. I was asking if you were aware—no more, thank you—if you were aware of a trustworthy person you could recommend as coachman—with a good pair-horse character, you know. Ours nearly overturned us the other day, and considering (*a little magniloquently*) that we pay the highest wages, it is rather hard we should be treated so. Such a one as you have would just suit us—so steady and respectable-looking. Let me see, it isn't you, though; it must be Mrs. Jackson—you don't keep a carriage, I think.

MRS. VESEY. (*Smiling with amiable malignity.*) No. I wish I could help you, Mrs. Hodgetts, but good servants are the rarest articles in the world now-a-days. As Lady Fitz-John was remarking to me the other day, the *nouveaux riches* have quite spoiled the market.

MRS. FANSHAWE. (*Secretly resentful.*) They are very scarce, certainly. But you must not complain, Mrs. Vesey, you have always been so fortunate. What a nice young man that was you had some time ago! By the way, what made you part with him?

MRS. VESEY. (*Who, as MRS. FANSHAWE perfectly well knows, has recently made a forced descent from a genteel young man out of livery to a small boy in buttons.*) He was a good servant, I must say. But fortunately I discovered that he was rather—well, how shall I put it—rather given to take more than was good for him, you understand. And when once a young man takes to that, there is not much hope left for him, in my opinion. It was better to get rid of him.

MRS. FANSHAWE. Oh! of course—quite necessary.

MRS. HODGETTS. (*Who does not understand French, and has been impressed with the familiarity of the reference to LADY FITZ-JOHN.*) You are well acquainted with her ladyship, Mrs. Vesey?

MRS. VESEY. Our families have always known each other. But, as you are aware, Lady Fitz-John has been a great deal out of England during her son's minority, so that for years we have had no opportunities of meeting.

MRS. HODGETTS. A beautifully furnished place, I believe?

MR. HODGETTS. Lord Fitz-John's? They say the cellars are the best stocked in the county.

MRS. HODGETTS. They won't hold out long if

all tales are true. Do you know any thing about that, Mrs. Vesey?

MRS. VESEY. About the cellars?

MRS. HODGETTS. No, no, about the young lord, I mean. Do you think it can be true what they say of his being so unsteady?

MRS. VESEY. Well, I don't know. We must not be too severe. People exaggerate so.

MRS. HODGETTS. I must say it looked very bad his stopping abroad last year when he came of age. Every body expected him home to take possession and show himself to the tenantry, and especially after the old place had been let so long to strangers—it would have been only right of him.

MRS. VESEY. It would have been better of course. But . . .

MRS. HODGETTS. They say he was at some horrid foreign gambling place all the time. Do you think that is true?

MR. TOMLINSON. Baden, to my own certain knowledge, and at the gaming-tables every night. I saw him there myself—when I was passing through, you know. A dreadful thing!

MRS. HODGETTS. Poor young man, how sad!

MR. TOMLINSON. He takes after his father, you see—no head for calculating odds. It won't be long before they have to put the estate into nursing again if he goes on at this rate. It's in the blood, I suppose.

MRS. HODGETTS. How very, very melancholy!

MRS. VESEY. Oh! but we must hope for better things. Even if he has been a little wild, it is never too late to mend, you know; and now that he is at home, he is showing every disposition to do his duty. This *fête* next month is to be a splendid affair, I hear.

MRS. HODGETTS. (*Who has no expectation of being invited.*) Is it? Well, I wish they mayn't spend more on their house-warming than they can afford, but I suppose Lady Fitz-John will take care of that. (*Pauses a little acridly.*) I'm sure I pity her, poor thing, from the bottom of my heart, as I should pity any mother under such circumstances; still, as you say, it is right to hope for the best, and wonders will never cease. Though I consider gambling a shocking vice, and I believe it isn't the worst thing he does, either. I don't know how true it may be, but I have heard he is rather too fond of . . . (*Taps the rim of her wine-glass and nods expressively.*)

MRS. VESEY. Oh! dear, dear! what a pity such things should get about!

MRS. HODGETTS. (*Inquisitively.*) You have heard of it, too, then?

MRS. VESEY. No, no, you must not ask me what I have heard. Such a young man, you know—it isn't fair, really. It has always been my doctrine that one can not be too lenient with young men of that age—don't you agree with me, Mr. Lee? They *must* go through a course of wild-oat-sowing and that sort of thing before settling down—mustn't they now?

RAYMOND. (*Savagely.*) I agree with you perfectly—in your admirable remark of a few minutes ago. When once a young man like Lord Fitz-John or your late footman takes to drinking and that sort of thing, there is not much hope left for him.

MRS. FANSHAWE. (*With an interrogative look round the table at the ladies.*) Hem! Shall we . . . (*Ladies all rise, and exeunt amid solemn silence.*)

It will be seen from this specimen of the conversation that Mrs. Vesey found her cavalier churlish, if not downright rude. He was indeed in most unreasonably ill-humor, and with that lady more especially, having conceived a horrible dislike to her from the beginning. He had taken it into his head that she represented more perfectly than any body else in the room the worldliness and conventionality with which all save one were more or less tainted; and every word that passed her lips increased his prejudice against her, and his indignation that she should be allowed to breathe the same air with the pure saint-like maiden whom he knew to be sitting so near her. It was a positive relief to him when the woman was gone from his side, even though all the other ladies were gone too.

With the departure of the ladies the frivolous element dropped out of the conversation, and the sordid element became predominant. The talk was altogether of money and money-making, and Raymond sat listening, not perhaps quite so indignantly as before (for there was no unworldly spiritual-minded being present now whose ears it could offend), but with yet more disgust and weariness. He almost despised himself for enduring the company of those dull-brained heavy-souled grovelers who could find nothing better to discourse upon even in their hours of recreation than buying and selling; and was more than once tempted to invent an excuse for leaving the table and the house, never to make an experiment of society again. But he thought of Minna, and forbore. He would like to see her and hear her at all events once again before returning to his exile, and therefore resigned himself to sit out the commercial slang of Mr. Fanshawe and his friends with marvelous patience.

At last the desired moment came, and Raymond found himself following the other gentlemen into the room whither the ladies had preceded them. He was immediately aware that Miss Fanshawe was seated at a side-table not far from the door, looking over a book of engravings with another lady. Yes, she was all that he had imagined—brighter and more sun-like even than his dull fancy could depict her.

The other lady was Mrs. Hodgetts, to whom Minna had temporarily allied herself in order to spare her temper the infliction of Mrs. and Miss Vesey. But no sooner had the gentlemen entered than Mrs. Hodgetts started up to tap her Sam on the arm, and ask him (he had *such* a memory for dates) whether it was three or four years ago that the Griffins returned from India, the detail being necessary to complete a story which she had been relating a quarter of an hour previously. Raymond felt positively grateful to the lady for her love of accuracy. For Minna was sitting quite by herself now, and, in moving to open a passage for Mrs. Hodgetts to her husband, Raymond was able, nay, was almost compelled, to draw some steps nearer the side-table.

Minna had never lifted her eyes since the door had opened to admit the gentlemen. But for all that, she was perfectly conscious that Mr. Lee was among them, conscious too that he had approached the table at the end of which she sat, and almost as conscious as he was himself that he was seeking something to say to her.

"How different he is from those other creatures!" she thought to herself as she riveted her

eyes on the open page before her—the “other creatures” being the young men from whom she had been in the habit of receiving incense. “So grand and strong and intellectual! I am sure he might be a great man if he chose.”

And yet from the moment of his entering the house that evening they had not exchanged a word.

At last he spoke, seizing the first commonplace that came into his head, in despair of finding any thing better worth saying.

“Those seem to be very fine engravings, Miss Fanshawe.”

Could any of the people on whose insipidities he had been so severe during dinner have begun conversation in flatter, tamer fashion? And he had not the smallest idea whether the engravings were fine or not—he could see nothing of them except their size. But after all, platitudes come more easily than any thing else, and it is harder than one would think to be quite sincere in general society.

He was ashamed of himself for a moment, but the feeling was forgotten almost immediately. For the fair bent head was raised, and a pair of bright lips answered—

“Yes, it is rather a nice collection, I think. Do you happen to know it?”

Diplomatic Minna! Of course Raymond could not answer the question without coming round to her side to see what the collection was. And when he was there, what so natural as that he should drop into the unoccupied chair which Mrs. Hodgetts had vacated?

“No,” said Raymond, after an inspection, perhaps unnecessarily prolonged, of the title-page. “May I look at some of them?”

And then he seated himself, as might have been expected.

“This first one is rather pretty,” said Minna, and she was really quite surprised to find how tremulous her voice was. “The landscape is so well done—don’t you think so? But the next is my favorite—it is the best of the whole series, in my opinion. Look, here it is—King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid; is it not beautiful?”

“What is it that you are admiring so much, Minna dear?” cried a female voice behind. “I must positively come and have a look.”

The speaker was Mrs. Vesey, who, having heard something of Raymond’s wealth, was willing to give him another chance in spite of his churlishness. Besides, she did not choose that Miss Fanshawe should enjoy an uninterrupted tête-à-tête with him while her own Arabella was sitting with nobody to talk to.

“A charming thing really!” she pronounced when she had put up her eye-glass. “What an exquisite face the girl’s is—so simple and unaffected! Quite justifies the king’s choice, eh? And that old courtier—oh dear! how scandalized he is looking! it is quite absurd. He is put in to represent the world, I suppose—the hard, cold, hollow-hearted world. But the king doesn’t mind a bit; he knows he is right, and that’s enough for him. Ah! a delicious subject—so fresh and—what do you call it—pastoral, you know. What are those lines at the bottom of the page, dear? I can’t read them from here.”

“A motto,” said Minna coldly, for she was highly displeased at what she considered Mrs. Vesey’s unwarrantable intrusion.

“A motto! And what does it say? Excuse me, dear;” and Mrs. Vesey approached her face a little nearer the page and slowly read off the following words:

“Silver and gold, and long descent,
What do they bring of true content?
Let them be!

“I seek a bride with richer store—
A loving heart, though nothing more.
This is she.”

“Charming! quite charming!” was again her comment. “A sweet idea, and so delightfully put.

“A loving heart, though nothing more.”

That’s the bit that takes my fancy.”

“May I turn over now?” asked Minna, fingering the leaf impatiently. She was angry, and hardly cared to conceal it.

But though Minna was curt and Raymond scowled, Mrs. Vesey still kept her ground and her temper.

“Turn over? Oh yes! certainly; I am quite ready. And what is the next pretty thing you have to show us? Petrarch and Laura—ah! very well done too. By the way, have you seen any thing of Laura Brown since her marriage?”

“Not yet. I don’t think mamma intends to call.”

“Does she not? Well, I think she is quite right—if people choose to marry into an inferior social position, they must take the consequences.”

“I suppose so,” said Minna a little regretfully. “Poor Laura! I hope she is happy.”

“Oh! I dare say they are happy enough just now, for I believe they are madly in love with each other. But how can it last, I should like to know? A clerk with two hundred a year—a dreadful *mésalliance* to be sure. Such a shabby little house I hear they are settled in—and only one servant, of course.”

“And is it not possible that happiness can last in a shabby little house with only one servant?” asked Raymond, looking up with sudden fierceness. He would have annihilated the woman if he could for daring to talk thus in Minna’s presence. “Or is it only in poetry and pictures that we can afford to be fresh and pastoral?”

“What is that, Mr. Lee? I don’t quite understand,” asked Mrs. Vesey, slightly disturbed by this vehemence.

“Nothing—nothing. It is a pretty line, that about a loving heart and nothing more, but the doctrine is only to be taken æsthetically of course. A *mésalliance* in art and a *mésalliance* in real life are two very different things, and so King Cophetua would have found out if he had worn a chimney-pot hat and a dress coat. Ah yes! the old courtier would have had it all his own way then. A hard, cold, hollow-hearted world, isn’t it?”

Mrs. Vesey bit her lip; without fully comprehending Raymond’s drift, she understood that she was being treated very rudely.

“I am afraid Arabella is sitting in a draft,” she said, turning away her head as though not hearing him. “Excuse me, dear (to Minna), I must go and speak to her.”

And she swept off majestically, determined to meddle no more with Mr. Lee for that evening.

“Poor Mrs. Vesey! only see how you have frightened her away,” said Minna, turning round to Raymond with one of her archest smiles.

He was penitent and humble in a moment.

"I have been very rude," he stammered. "I am sorry, but" . . .

"Oh! don't be sorry, Mr. Lee, pray—not on my account, at least. To tell you the truth, I am rather pleased than otherwise to see her routed—she has always been a pet aversion of mine."

"You don't like her? I am glad of it," said Raymond warmly. "But indeed I should have been surprised to hear that you did, she seems so thoroughly worldly and conventional."

"I don't know about that, but I don't like her. Still I could almost have pitied her just now—you were so dreadfully hard upon her. A little too hard perhaps. For though all my sympathies were on your side, Mr. Lee, I think she might have found a good deal to say for herself if she had chosen—really I do."

She shook her golden curls and laughed a low musical laugh. Raymond sat looking at her the while (he could not look away from her), and thought he had never seen any thing half so beautiful.

She made a short pause and then resumed. She was clever, and could not resist the temptation of letting Raymond see it.

"For you know, Mr. Lee, poetry and real life really *are* different things, after all, and what sounds very well in the one isn't so pleasant to practice in the other. A real King Cophetua wouldn't have taken a real beggar-maid, I'm sure, for a real beggar-maid wouldn't have had those nice ribbon-streamers down her back, or those beautiful white hands, but would have been an untidy creature, dreadfully freckled and sunburnt, and talking with a horrid Irish accent. And then King Cophetua did not propose love in a cottage, did he? 'This beggar-maid shall be my queen,' he says in Tennyson's version, which is the only one I know. And I have no doubt they found out afterward that she was somebody's daughter changed at nurse with an immense fortune—they always do in all the poems and romances I ever read. But it would not be safe to trust to that in real life; at least if I were a king I should be afraid of running the risk. You see I am a very prosaic, practical person."

Was Raymond angry with her for this open profession of cynicism? Not the least in the world. Coming from Mrs. Vesey, such a speech would have been accurately noted by him and every word set down as a new reason for detesting the speaker; coming from Minna, its sense was almost lost on him. He had never seen her speak with such animation before, and was attending too eagerly to the play of her features and the inflections of her voice to take in the meaning of what she said. He was aware indeed that she left off with declaring herself prosaic and practical, but instead of being shocked he only felt amused—amused at the incongruity of the words with the dainty lips that uttered them.

"You are laughing at me now, Mr. Lee," she said poutingly, detecting the smile on his face. "Have I been saying any thing so very ridiculous?"

"It sounds so, I confess, to hear you apply such inappropriate epithets to yourself."

"Inappropriate! and pray who told you that they are inappropriate?"

"There are things one knows without being told," he answered with a half grave, half smiling glance at her beautiful face.

"Ah! but this is a thing you can not know, Mr. Lee. In the first place, it is not true, for the epithets are very appropriate indeed, and in the next, you have had no means of forming an opinion on the subject. You are very rash in leaping to conclusions, certainly. Why, you have only known me since the day before yesterday."

The day before yesterday! It seemed almost incredible to herself that their acquaintance had been so recent. A whole age appeared to have passed since the day she had seen him first in the factory yard.

"And the poor man who was hurt?" she inquired, her thoughts reverting to the incident which had been the cause of their meeting. "I have been thinking of him so often. He is going on well, I hope."

She did hope so very strongly. The man had never done any thing for her, and yet somehow she felt grateful to him. And Raymond did not lose the sense of her words this time, but caught at them greedily as a new proof of the beauty of her nature.

"He is going on almost better than we had hoped. And he shall want for nothing, either now or on his recovery, you may depend on it," he added emphatically.

The poor fellow was in luck certainly, as he would have said could he have known how kindly his employer thought of him.

Minna pondered a few seconds, and then asked—

"Do you think the doctors would allow him to have any thing nicer than their horribly wholesome dry toast and water-gruel? Any thing like jellies or preserved fruits, I mean?"

"Well, I dare say he is almost well enough now to venture on an imprudence."

"Then mamma will send a basket to the hospital to-morrow," said Minna, almost clapping her hands with enthusiasm at the prospect.

"You can be practical in some things, Miss Fanshawe," said Raymond smiling. "But not prosaic, remember I don't admit that."

"Ah! but I am dreadfully prosaic."

"If you were, you and that lady (indicating Mrs. Vesey) would be sworn friends. And you say you don't like her."

"I certainly don't and never shall. Do you think her so very prosaic then?"

"One of the most prosaic-minded persons I have ever met."

"How you do dislike her, to be sure! But I knew you did from the very first. I heard what you were saying to her at dinner, Mr. Lee."

"I forget now what it was all about. I hope I was not very rude."

"About bazaars, you know, for one thing. And really I thought you were too severe upon them. Pleasure and business go together sometimes, and so do pleasure and instruction—or rather amusement and instruction, that's the phrase—and why should pleasure and charity be a forbidden combination?"

"I think charity ought to be in itself a pleasure which needs none other to increase it," said Raymond, hesitatingly. He did not feel near-

ly so confident of his position now that he had Minna for an antagonist.

"Yes, but if in point of fact we can increase it and serve the interests of charity at the same time?" persisted Minna. "For my own part, I think bazaars may be made to do a great deal of good." She paused a moment somewhat undecidedly, and presently inquired—"I suppose then, with your views, there is no chance of your being at St. Cecelia's Hall on Friday?"

"I never mix in any such gayeties," said Raymond, and there was a shade of regret in his voice as he spoke. "Not that my conscience is so strict as to make me think there would be any harm in it," he added hastily.

"No, no, I understand; you object to being bored, that's all. And it would bore you, no doubt (a little sigh here). Though I am weak enough to look forward to it rather. They say the hall is to be so splendidly decorated, and we are sure to have some beautiful music. You have heard of Stringer and Wyndham's band, I suppose? Oh! I know we shall have a great treat."

"I think I must try to hear that band," said Raymond, looking a good deal embarrassed.

"Friday is the day, you say?"

"Yes, the day on which we are going, at least. There are to be two days of it, you know—Friday and Saturday."

"Friday would suit me best," said Raymond.

Neither Minna nor Raymond was tired of the interview, but it was interrupted here by Mrs. Hodgetts, who came up to ask Miss Fanshawe to favor the company with some music. Nor was there any opportunity of renewing it, for, after Minna and Arabella had each contributed two or three songs and pieces to the evening's entertainment, Mrs. Hodgetts's carriage was announced, and a general break-up of the guests took place.

Surely no guests had ever gone from the house whose departure left Minna in so strange a flutter. Her eyes had met Raymond's at parting, and his had been, or had seemed to her, so full of tenderness and reverential homage that she would sooner have had that look than another half hour of undisturbed dialogue.

"How wonderfully expressive they are!" was her inward comment as she listened to the outer door closing upon him—the plural pronoun referring to Raymond's eyes. "The finest I ever saw, and so expressive. He is enormously clever—any body may see that; the cleverest man in the world almost, I should think. And so stern and severe with every body except me. Mrs. Vesey was quite afraid of him, and no wonder—he put her down so beautifully. But I am not afraid of him—ah no! Something tells me he could not be angry with me even if he tried."

Her meditations were disturbed by an exclamation from Mrs. Fanshawe, who was opening a note which had been put into her hand in the course of the evening.

"Minna, my darling child! what do you think? It's the invitation after all. Didn't I tell you so?"

"What invitation?" asked Minna absently.

"Why, child, Lady Fitz-John's invitation of course. There, what do you think of that?"

At the beginning of the evening Minna would have been thrown into an ecstasy by the note which Mrs. Fanshawe tossed to her. But now it

was only a tepid kind of interest which she was capable of feeling in the subject.

"Ah yes! I see," she said, glancing languidly over the missive. "Well, I am glad Lady Fitz-John has made herself polite at last."

And then she handed it back, and tried to recall what Raymond had said about coming to the bazaar on Friday.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNEXPECTED SUMMONS.

NEXT morning, when the sunbeams shining through the light drapery of her window kissed away the sleep from Minna's eyelids, it seemed to her that she was awaking into a new life fairer and brighter than any she had ever known. She was in the world still, but a spell appeared to have been laid upon it since her last awakening which made it look more like a region of fairy-land than its common work-a-day self. Perhaps it was that she was yet under the impression of her dreams, and her dreams that night had been very pleasant.

She was more than usually pensive and abstracted at her toilet, musing a great deal with herself and getting on very slowly. But her meditation was not of a kind to leave any of the pale cast of thought on her cheeks, and when at last she entered the breakfast-room, they were glowing as brightly and freshly as the morning itself. Mrs. Fanshawe thought that she had never seen her Minna look so well.

"Good-morning, dear child. Why, how late you are to-day! Your papa has done breakfast this half hour, and gone off to finish the newspaper in his study. Which will you have this morning—tea or coffee? By the way, there's a letter for you somewhere—oh! here it is."

"I can't think who it is from, I'm sure," said Minna, scanning the superscription. "I don't know the writing at all."

"Nor I either, and I can't make out the post-mark. Such a round funny little hand, isn't it?"

Minna opened the letter, her fingers trembling a little in consequence of a certain wild fancy which had crossed her brain for an instant. An absurdly wild fancy, as she admitted to herself, for, other improbabilities apart, what could be more extravagant than the idea of Mr. Lee writing a hand which it was possible to characterize as round and funny?

"Well, dear, what is it?" asked Mrs. Fanshawe curiously. But Minna was too much engrossed to answer, and Mrs. Fanshawe, looking at her with some anxiety, saw that she had suddenly changed color.

The letter she was reading ran as follows:—

"BLACK MOOR FARM, HOLLSWORTH,

"Wednesday.

"MY DEAR MINNIE:—I hope you will excuse the liberty I am taking in writing to you, but as things have happened, I think it is my duty. I am sure you will be sorry to hear that dear father had a bad accident yesterday evening in nailing up the cherry-tree. The ladder slipped and he fell down and hurt his head, and has never properly come to himself since. I am glad to

say the doctor seems to think that he is only stunned and may perhaps get well again, but I am very anxious and unhappy. What makes me trouble you is that two or three times he has put up his hands and cried 'Minnie;' it is the only word he has said since it happened. I have been very much puzzled what to do, and I have nobody to advise me, but I think it is only right that I should ask you to come and see him; it seems dreadful to let him call for any thing in vain when he is so ill, and I am afraid he may be worse than the doctor says. I hope you will come. I will get a bed-room ready for you so that you may stay near him till the danger is over, and will try to make every thing as comfortable for you as possible, though of course very different from what you have been accustomed to. Please do come, as soon as you can, for indeed he is very ill. I will now conclude, and begging you to excuse blots, for I am in great distress, believe me to be, my dear Minnie, your affectionate sister,

"AMY HAROLDSON.

"P. S. I hope I have directed it right. I think I have heard you are called Miss Fanshawe now, so I suppose any other name would not find you."

Looking very pale, Minna silently passed this letter to Mrs. Fanshawe, who, knowing that something was wrong, received it in silence also, and read it in her turn. An uncomfortable pause followed, broken at last by the elder lady.

"My poor dear child! what a thing this is for you! What are you going to do about it?"

"I think I should like to go, mamma, if you please. I should not be long away, you know."

Mrs. Fanshawe was in a dilemma. She was not hampered by any feeling of tenderness or compassion for John Haroldson; on the contrary, she was provoked with him for having presumed even in delirium to ask for Minna. But she was weak enough to feel a superstitious scruple about refusing what might prove to be the last wish of a dying man.

"It's very awkward—very awkward indeed. I don't like to take the responsibility of advising, and yet . . . You must do as you wish about it, of course. Only I can't help thinking your—this letter exaggerates the danger very much. In fact, for my own part, I don't believe there is any thing serious the matter."

"I hope not, mamma. But if there was, you know" . . .

"Oh yes! I quite understand your feelings, my dear, and I would not for an instant stand in the way of your doing what you think right. But it is a great pity it has happened, that's all—a dreadful pity."

"Yes," said Minna sadly, "it is very dreadful. I remember him so well; he always noticed me a great deal, and I used to be very fond of him. It all comes back to me now so plainly! Poor father—I am very, very sorry."

It was the first time for years that Minna had adverted to the fact that she had a father living other than Mrs. Fanshawe's husband—much less said any thing to show that she still held him in kindly remembrance. But Mrs. Fanshawe grudged poor John Haroldson even this, and it was with a well-defined though secret pang of jealousy that she answered—

"Don't fret, my darling, don't fret. It is all very well to be sorry, of course—one feels sorry for any-body under such circumstances—but you are our daughter now, remember, mine and your papa's. There is nobody in the world who loves you or ever can love you—as a parent at least—half so well as we do, mind that."

"Oh yes! I know," said Minna, and she gave a little involuntary sigh.

"I am sure you do, dear child. He may have been very kind to you, I dare say—I have no doubt he was—but any body may see he can not have been so extraordinarily fond of you, or he would not have given you up."

"Of course he would not, mamma. Oh! I have very often thought about that. But as I am actually sent for, I feel it is my duty to go."

"Perhaps it may be, my dear—for this once. It is not what I like—I may say it is not what I have a right to expect—that you should be interfered with in this way, but as it has happened so, you must do as you think best yourself."

"Thank you, mamma. Then I will go at once, please."

"Very well. It is the safe side, of course, if any thing was to happen. I could not bear to have you fretting yourself afterward with thinking that you had the least thing to reproach yourself with. You will come away as soon as possible, I am sure? This afternoon, if you find him better?"

"Oh yes, mamma, as soon as ever I can."

"Perhaps, though, it would be as well not to return to-day, after all," continued Mrs. Fanshawe, pondering. "Miss Chatterton said something about spending the afternoon with us, and if she was here when you came home you would be catechised to death about where you had been. I will make a proper excuse for you, and you can take the first train back to-morrow."

"Yes—if he is better. Oh! mamma, you will take care not to let Miss Chatterton or any body else know where I am, won't you?" she added anxiously.

"Of course, my dear; I will take good care. And let me see—it is lucky your papa has not gone to the counting-house yet—he shall escort you to the station and see you off, so that the servants shan't get gossiping about the name of the place the ticket is taken for."

"I would not have any body know for the world," said Minna, clasping her hands affrightedly. An idea had just occurred to her which threw her into a state of panic terror. What if Raymond Lee should find out that her father was not the rich Mr. Fanshawe, but a rough country farmer?

"My poor pet, how frightened you look! It is very, very hard on you. But nobody shall hear of it—trust me for that."

"I do, mamma. But oh! I hope they won't find out about me in some other way. I am afraid a great many people here know that I am not really your daughter, and I have just been thinking that perhaps they will get talking of it to—to people who don't know it already, I mean. There is Mr. Lee, for instance, he evidently has no idea of such a thing, and it would be very cruel if he were told—he or any other new acquaintance, I mean; of course it would be all the same. But people are so spiteful, and I feel certain that that horrid Mrs. Vesey would do

me an ill turn if she could. Oh! mamma, I am very silly, but I can't help it."

The last words were an apology for a great burst of tears which she could not restrain as she realized the idea of Raymond discovering the truth of her parentage. She had shed no tears over Amy's note.

"Hush, darling, hush," soothingly said Mrs. Fanshawe, her womanly instinct perhaps divining something of the cause of this excessive emotion. "She won't get an opportunity of telling him any thing about you, and if she does, there is no great harm done after all. Neither she nor any body else has ever heard a word about you—your Hollsworth relations, thank goodness, and being my adopted daughter doesn't prove that you are not perfectly well connected, you know. Nobody could look at you, my beautiful pet, and take such a notion into their heads for an instant."

"I am glad you think so, mamma," said Minna, blushing through her tears. "Only some people are so fond of blackening other people's characters"

She broke down again with a little sob.

"My dear love, don't alarm yourself. Mr. Lee is the last person living to be influenced by any body's idle gossip, I should say. And let the worst come to the worst, I don't know if it would so very much signify if he was. He is not the only man in the world, my dear."

"I was not thinking particularly about Mr. Lee," said Minna, drying her eyes hastily. "I only mentioned him as an example."

Oh! Minna!

"No, no, there are others," went on Mrs. Fanshawe musingly, with no notice of the interruption. "Be sure you don't stay a day longer away than you can help, Minna. To-morrow won't be a bit too soon to begin thinking about your dress for the *fête*."

"And there will be the bazaar too," rejoined Minna dolefully. "We promised to go the first day, and Mrs. Wilks will be so disappointed if we don't keep our word. Oh! I will be back as soon as I possibly can, you may depend upon it."

"You are sure you ought to go?" said Mrs. Fanshawe dubiously. She thought she detected on Minna's part symptoms of wavering which it might be well to encourage if it could be done without taking on herself the responsibility of direct dissuasion.

But if Minna had been in any danger of wavering, Mrs. Fanshawe's question recalled her to a sense of duty at once.

"Yes, mamma, I am sure I ought to go. I should feel myself very wicked if I did not."

And, answering thus resolutely, she left the room without farther delay to prepare for her journey.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD HOME.

EARLY in the afternoon of that same day, a pretty young lady dressed in the height of the fashion was seen walking by herself along the road which leads from Hollsworth to Black Moor Farm. The few passers-by who met her, consisting of some half dozen carters and market-women,

turned their heads to look at her with surprise, knowing that there was no one the least like her belonging to the neighborhood. Their surprise would have been considerably increased could they have guessed that the fashionable stranger was Farmer Haroldson's eldest daughter.

Minna indeed it was, who, with no need of asking her way, had unhesitatingly found and followed the road leading to her father's house.

She had never traversed it since childhood, and yet now it seemed to her that she knew it better than any street in St. Austin's. And with the sense of familiarity came a strange yearning sense of liking and affection. She was glad to see the old place again, and to find it still unchanged, wondering at herself for having let those thousand pleasant memories so long lie dormant which now rushed back on her with every step she took. The Black Moor stretched before her bleak and barren in spite of the noon-day sun shining on it, but she heeded its bleakness and barrenness not. To her the weird landscape seemed smiling and companionable, and her heart swelled when she looked on it as though at sight of an old friend.

She was inclined for a moment to reproach herself for having been content to spend so many years away from her former home without revisiting it, but quieted her conscience with the reflection that, if she had been cared for there, she would not have been as it were thrust from it. As her words to her aunt that morning had implied, it was not the first time that this argument had comforted her. For, whatever her faults of frivolity or worldliness, she had not grown up to womanhood without occasionally casting a tender thought behind on the old scenes and times from which years were gradually dividing her farther and farther; and but for some such argument she might not have resigned herself so easily as she did to the futility of attempting a reconciliation between past and present.

She came at length in front of the farm-house, and paused at the well-remembered garden gate which she had last passed through as a weeping child fifteen years before. She could have fancied herself a child again as she looked up at the unchanged physiognomy of the building. In presence of that familiar gray stone front, with those eaves and gables every one of which she knew by heart, it was difficult to believe that all things were not, like them, still as they had been. As one in a dream she lifted the latch and went up the little garden toward the open door, through which as she came nearer she caught a glimpse of the kitchen, with the sanded floor and raftered roof which her visions of home had always shown her. All was so much as she had known it that she half expected to find her mother busied there as of yore.

But now, within doors, presented itself the first sign of change. Instead of the gentle sweet-voiced mother whom she remembered so well, she found only a big slatternly-looking woman who had been hired in a hurry to do the housework while Amy performed the office of sick-nurse.

"You are the young lady what was expected, I s'pose, miss," said this personage before Minna had found voice to speak. "Then, please,

you're to wait in the parlor, and I'll run up stairs and tell Miss Amy. She'll be down directly, I dare say—she don't mind leaving the master for a bit now that he's come to himself. This way, miss. Better? Oh yes; the master's much better to-day. He's got the turn now, you see, and after that folks is sure to do nicely."

With which aphorism Minna found herself left alone in the neat little parlor which now, as in Mrs. Haroldson's time, was reserved exclusively for occasions of state and ceremony.

How well she remembered it, to be sure!

There was the little mahogany chiffonier she used to think so grand—there the horse hair sofa on which she had seen her mother sit reading on Sunday afternoons. There on the mantel-piece were the same ornaments which had adorned it fifteen years before—the pretty painted scent-bottles that would be handed down for her to smell at when she was good, the china lady and gentleman *à la* Louis Quatorze whom she was allowed to consider as her property, and regarding whose imaginary history and antecedents she was always asking questions. She had been in terrible grief concerning one of those figures once, having by misadventure knocked off the lady's arm, but her mother had comforted her, kissing away her tears, and showing how the piece could be cemented on again so that the fracture would be hardly visible. Ah! what happy old times those were, and what a kind mother that dead mother of hers had been!

She was beginning to feel strangely affected by these memories, when suddenly a question occurred to her which drove them all out of her head and froze in their source the tears which were rising to her eyes. What would Mr. Lee think if he could see into that shabby little parlor, and guess that she had tender recollections connected with yonder paltry chiffonier and horse hair sofa and those odiously vulgar mantel-piece ornaments? Her face glowed with shame and mortification at the mere idea.

Presently a light step was heard coming down stairs and along the passage, and Minna knew that she was about to see her sister. And curiously enough, the elegantly dressed town-bred young lady, accustomed to mix in society from her childhood up, without an iota of shyness, could not help paying the little country-girl the compliment of feeling a certain nervous trepidation at her approach. As the door opened to admit her sister, Minna felt her heart beat.

It was certainly no very formidable-looking person who appeared. A short plump figure demurely clad in a brown stuff dress, a round childish face (the nose slightly *retroussé*), with brown hair and eyes, and a complexion which malice, overlooking the healthy glow of the warm red blood mantling underneath, might have called brown also—such were the figure and face of Minna's sister, as unlike Minna's own as could well be imagined. A less imposing aspect it would be difficult to conceive, and yet somehow there was something taking about it. For while the short figure was perfectly neat and well-proportioned, the round face looked temptingly soft and velvety, and the homely brown eyes, when they were not shyly concealed by downcast lids fringed with singularly long and silken lashes, shone (sparkling was quite out of

their line) with a clear honest light very pleasant to behold.

A great deal more was visible just now of the lashes than of the eyes; their owner, in spite of her nineteen summers, pausing on the threshold in a state of such evident embarrassment that Minna felt obliged to give her a little encouragement.

"How do you do, Amy? I am very glad to see you."

She held out her hand, in which Amy, still looking very shy, came up and laid hers. And then Minna, suddenly resolving a moot point which she had been debating during the journey to no purpose, bent down her lips to the soft round face and kissed it. Decidedly it would not do not to kiss her own sister.

"Dear Minnie!" said Amy gratefully. She had hardly known whether or not to expect so distinguished a mark of favor.

"Dear Amy!" said Minna, pressing her sister's hand (another kiss would have been carrying things too far).

There was an awkward pause, again broken by Minna.

"I am glad to hear that my father is so much better."

She had already decided that "my father" was the proper phrase to be used in speaking of John Haroldson. "Papa" was appropriated to Mr. Fanshawe, and "father" was of course too vulgar to be thought of for a moment. She might have said "our father," to be sure, but considering that she knew so little of Amy, the expression would perhaps have been unnecessarily familiar.

"Yes," said Amy, "he is very much better. He came to himself last night as if he were waking up from sleep, and though the bruises are giving him a good deal of pain, I am not frightened about him any more now. I was dreadfully frightened yesterday, or of course I should never have thought of troubling you," she added with a timid glance of apology from under the long eyelashes.

"There is no harm done," replied Minna graciously. "I am very much pleased to have an opportunity of seeing you both again."

"It is very, very kind of you. Would you mind waiting a few minutes while I go and tell father you are here? I did not like even to let him know that I had written to you, in case there might be some disappointment. Please sit down."

With these words the little brown figure vanished from the room, and Minna was left by herself to consider the impression which her sister had made upon her.

"What a nice little thing! And that is really my sister. My sister—how strange it sounds to have a sister! I wonder if she has learned the piano—not a note, I am afraid. But she has turned out very well, considering her disadvantages, poor girl. How I should like to know her! I am sure we should get on capitally—she is so sweet and good-tempered-looking, and I should be so kind to her. It makes one quite sorry to think of her having been so neglected. Oh dear! what a pleasure it would be to develop her and form her manners—they *would* form, I feel certain. Well, perhaps some day"

The flow of her thoughts came to a sudden stop here. What would Mr. Lee think if he saw

Amy before the process of formation was complete? She shook her head rather sadly as she admitted the impossibility that the nice little thing and herself could ever be more to each other than they were already.

Meanwhile the younger sister had gone up stairs to her father, intent on breaking to him the news of Minna's arrival. The task was one of some delicacy, for the pain of his bruises, complicated by a sharp touch of rheumatism which had treacherously taken that opportunity of attacking him, had made him yet more irritable and excitable than usual.

"Father," she began timidly, creeping softly to his bedside, "are you awake?"

The bed-clothes tossed tumultuously at the question.

"Awake—I should think I was awake. Awake! yes, and likely to be awake for many a long hour to come, confound it. What do you mean by asking?"

"Only that I have something to say to you, father dear. You know of course that for a long time after the accident you were very ill."

"Yes, and I know I'm very ill still. What's the good of telling me that?"

"And lay for hours and hours almost as if you were dead," persisted Amy. "Except that every now and then you put up your hands and called for Minnie."

"Called for *what*?"

Amy looked very much frightened.

"For Minnie," she repeated tremulously.

"Did I? More fool I then, that's all. Now be quiet again if you can."

"But, father, I must explain it all to you, or you won't understand. I didn't know what to do when I heard you; you were so ill, and I was afraid something dreadful might be going to happen, and at last I made up my mind that—that—don't be angry, father—that I would write to tell her of it."

"Write to *her*? And you did—did you? Then you've acted like an idiot. What do you think she cared whether I was ill or well, dead or alive? And I suppose she let you know pretty quick that it was nothing to her—eh? Sent the letter back unopened, eh? Or her compliments and to say she was sorry to hear the old man was making an ass of himself. Eh? eh? eh?"

He had raised himself on his elbow, and spoke with an angry vehemence which terrified her.

"Oh no! father, no! How can you say these things?"

"What did she do, then?"

"She set out directly she had my letter," murmured Amy, without daring to look up.

"Set out! Where from—where to—what for?"

"To come here, father. And—and she is waiting down stairs just now."

For an instant a thrill as of an electric shock quivered through John Haroldson's whole frame. In the next he sank back on his pillow weak and trembling with emotion.

"Minnie—my little Minnie," he cried, hoarsely. "My Minnie come back to her old father! Quick—quick—what are you waiting for? Minnie—my little darling—how happy we shall be!"

He waved his shaking hand with a gesture of feverish impatience which Amy hastened to obey.

If Minna had been agitated at the prospect of

meeting her sister, she was still more so when she was summoned to appear before her father. Her heart beat faster than ever as she followed Amy up stairs and entered with her the room where the sick man lay—the same where she remembered him lying when she parted from him last. She recognized it, and looked round with eyes before which a mist had suddenly arisen.

"Minnie—my little Minnie," cried a feeble voice from behind the bed-curtain.

It was the voice of her father calling to her from the bed by which she had stood to bid him good-bye fifteen years ago. And at the same moment she saw the curtain drawn impatiently back and her father's arms stretched forth to embrace her.

All the emotions of that far-distant time thronged back on her heart as she heard and saw. She forgot Mrs. Fanshawe, and Mrs. Fanshawe's nice house, and Mrs. Fanshawe's grand friends, forgot all that had passed since she had last left that room, and rushed to the bedside as eagerly as she would have rushed then if she had heard herself called back as she went weeping into exile. In another moment her arms were round her father's neck, and—a child again—she was sobbing out the grief of fifteen years ago on his bosom.

CHAPTER XVII.

DISENCHANTMENT.

It was long before she raised her head from his shoulder (she had forgotten all about the pretty Paris bonnet which she was crushing unmercifully out of shape), and, when she did, it was only to gaze with a fresh burst of tears on his familiar sun-burned face—so familiar that she scarcely noticed the sun-burning. And in his turn he gazed back on hers hardly knowing that it was beautiful; he saw nothing of it save that it was his child's, and that it was looking at him kindly.

"Minnie—little Minnie—so you have come back to me at last? You love your poor old father after all."

She took his hand in both hers, and raised it fondly to her lips, not even then discovering that it was rough and horny.

"Father—dear, dear father."

"My little darling child! How happy we shall be!"

The hearts of both were full, and a long silence followed, during which he lay looking at her as she stood by his bedside, his eyes overflowing with loving tenderness. At last he spoke, caressing the hand which he held clasped in his.

"You must forgive me, Minnie dear—I shall not be happy till you have forgiven me."

"Forgive you! Dear father, there is nothing to forgive. Every thing has been for the best."

She thought he was going to excuse himself for having given her up to her aunt.

"I see now how hardly I have judged you, though God knows such a one as I can have no right to be hard on any one (his voice nearly broke down here). But I was always passionate and headstrong, Minnie, and when I found you were not coming back to us, it hurt me so that I seemed to hate you for it. You will forgive me, won't you?"

She was very much surprised, but said nothing, and in answer to his appealing look pressed his hand warmly.

"You have come back to me, and it is all over now like a horrible dream, and yet I can't help speaking of it. Yes, you may forgive me, dear, for I quite understand how unreasonable I have been. Little folks are made to like change and fine things, and you were such a little one then, Minnie! It was only nature you should take to your aunt when you were sent to live with her; it wouldn't have been nature any other way. I was the one to blame first of all, for letting you go; but we were so poor, and though I could have borne the poverty for myself, I couldn't for you, my darling. It was for your sake, Minnie dear, or I'd sooner have cut my right hand off."

"Dear father! Oh yes! I ought to have thought of that before—I have been to blame too. But now that I know you really care to see me, it shall be quite different. I will come to visit you very often—it will be a great happiness."

She had expected that the prospect would please him as much as it did herself, but to her surprise his countenance suddenly fell.

"Visit—what do you mean? You are going away then?"

"I am sorry I can not stay longer this time. But I promised mam—Aunt Fanshawe—to be back by the first train to-morrow; we have a particular engagement for the afternoon."

She felt the hand which he had been holding hitherto abruptly released.

"It is a great pity," she stammered. "But really I can not help it."

"No, no, it was all my mistake—all my mistake." He burst into a harsh laugh, and added—"Only think what an idiot I've been and made of myself! When I heard you were down stairs, I was goose enough to take it into my head you had come to stay with me always. I thought you had found out that blood was thicker than water, may be. Ha! ha! did you ever hear of such an old greenhorn?"

She felt very much hurt and shocked, and none the less so that for the first time her ear detected the strong country accent with which he spoke; so strong it was that she could not understand how she had not noticed it sooner.

"It grieves me very much that you should be disappointed, father, but I do not think it is my fault. If you will only consider a little, I am sure you will see that I could not be expected to give up my home where I have always been so happy" . . .

"Of course I see you could not be expected. Why, I might as well expect to find a heart in the inside of a pebble as to find a fashionable lady liking her old father better than her balls and parties and fine dresses. I don't know how I came to pitch on such a notion, I'm sure, but you see I've been ill, and that has made my head weak, I suppose. Ha! ha! ha! it was a good 'un, wasn't it?"

A good 'un! And the phrase was not used jocularly—he was too terribly earnest in his irony for that. If Mr. Lee had been there to hear!

"I am sorry you think I deserve this, father. But you said yourself just now that it would have been unnatural of me not to love my aunt

when she was so kind, and I think it would—unnatural and ungrateful."

"Well, and I don't say different now, do I? I am only amused at myself for being such an old buzzard. Leave the glasses alone, can't you, and don't be making such a confounded clatter."

The last words, spoken very sharply, were addressed to Amy, as she was taking down a medicine bottle and wine-glass from the mantel-piece.

"I was going to give you your afternoon drops, father—I ought to have thought of it before."

"Why didn't you think of it before, then? You'd have thought of it before, I warrant, if you'd been in half the pain I've been lying in all morning. But you may put it back again, I won't touch it. I've been dosed enough already, and dang me if I'll stand any more of it. Put it down, do you hear?"

He spoke so fiercely that his poor little nurse dared not expostulate, and laid down the phial in evident trepidation. Minna saw her frightened look, and could not help inwardly resenting the tyranny and injustice which had called it forth. She knew that she herself had been the exciting cause of this overflow of wrath, and magnanimously interposed to divert it if possible from Amy.

"I see you are offended with me, father. But really I do not know what I have done."

"Offended! Oh! dear no—not at all. How should I be offended? Would you mind taking away your hand—I can't bear to have any body's hand sprawling about on my bed-clothes."

She drew her hand back as quickly as if she had been stung.

"And perhaps you'll be kind enough to sit down and not stand staring at me like that. It's bad enough to have the rheumatics jobbing like penknives first at one joint and then at another, without being stared at."

She sat down without speaking, and immediately became absorbed in the task of smoothing out the creases which she had discovered to have been made in her new silk skirt while she had been bending over her father's pillow. But the promptness of her obedience failed to soothe the sick man's irritation.

"If you think I ought to take physic, you'd better give it to me," he said to Amy testily.

"Ugh! if you only felt what I'm feeling now, you'd have a sharper memory perhaps."

"I will get it directly. I am so sorry for you, father dear."

"Come and put my pillow straight, will you? Not that way—I never knew such awkward hands as you've got to-day. What's that confounded swishing noise? I wish to Heaven it would stop, or I shall be in a fever with it."

Minna took the hint directly, and left the creases to themselves. But even this did not pacify him.

"Oh! it was you, was it? I hate silk frocks. Now then, Amy, am I to have any doctor's stuff or am I not? You leave me to think of every thing for myself."

Poor Amy, who had been called in a hurry to adjust her father's pillow, hastened back to the task of preparing the medicine, sadly bewildered by the difficulty of pleasing him.

"Now then, what are you staring about for? Can't you give me the physic and have done with it?"

"I was looking for the spoon to measure it with, father. I thought I saw it just now."

"Well done, you're the slowest coach that ever I came across."

"There is one on the mantel-piece," put in Minna quickly. And, glad to have an opportunity of serving her poor frightened-looking little sister, she rose to fetch it herself.

The act was performed with the best intentions, but was attended with very undesirable results. In coming away from the mantle-piece, Minna's long dress caught in the fire-irons, and brought them clattering down with a noise which made her look very penitent and set the invalid's nerves all on edge.

"What the devil?" he cried angrily. "That confounded frock again! And bless my heart, see there—it's a yard too long. Why can't you wear clothes like other people? Look at Amy, she don't drag a tail after her."

Minna's penitence had all evaporated now. She glanced at Amy's dress with an expression which she did not intend to be disdainful, but which was so nevertheless, and answered coldly—

"It is the fashion for dresses to be worn long. I can not help it."

"Then it's a beastly bad fashion, that's all I've got to say. And as ugly as sin."

"I am sorry you think so. I rather like it myself."

She ought not to have said this, but it was a little spurt of temper which she could not restrain.

"That's lucky, for I suppose you would not dress out of the fashion to save your life and your soul too. Oh! this is the physic, is it? Give it here then, you've been long enough making it. Amy, if ever you wear a frock like that, I'll never forgive you."

Minna felt very much offended, and hardly attempted to make a secret of it.

"I am disturbing you, I am afraid," she said with dignity. "Perhaps I had better go down stairs."

"Yes, yes, go down stairs as soon as you like, both of you. I should have been asleep an hour ago if I had been let alone. No, no, Amy, you needn't stay. I've had enough of company for to-day. Let me be—I want to go to sleep."

The sisters looked at each other, and silently went out together. The room was as quiet now as John Haroldson would wish it, but, quiet as it was, he did not sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DROPPED IN TO TEA.

MINNA had been accustomed all her life to be humored and indulged, and the sense of injury with which she left her father's presence was stronger than perhaps it ought to have been. She was wounded and angry—so angry that, had it not been for her dread of confronting the curiosity of Miss Chatterton, she would have left the house at once with a determination never to re-enter it. As it was, she resigned herself to accept the shelter of its roof till next morning, but with an unwillingness which was manifest

to Amy even in the midst of her hospitable cares.

The poor little thing was dreadfully vexed, and tried hard to make excuses.

"He is so ill to-day, you know, poor dear—you mustn't mind him," she pleaded. "Oh! when he is well he is quite different."

"I am glad to hear it. I should be sorry to think that you were always liable to be treated as unjustly as I have been to-day."

"Oh! but he didn't mean half what he said, I'm sure. You must forget it—indeed, indeed you must."

"When people have been used as I was used just now, they are not always able to forget it," said Minna, with more solemnity than was perhaps necessary, for her dignity was in arms. "My feelings have been very much hurt."

"I am so sorry, it was all my fault, you know; I ought to have seen he wasn't fit to bear the excitement, and I do feel that I am very much to blame for having exposed you to—to any thing so painful. I can only say that I am sorry—very, very sorry."

The intensity of her little sister's penitence was an appeal to Minna's innate good-nature which it was not able to resist. She remembered that after all Amy had done nothing to offend her, and felt a magnanimous impulse to comfort and reassure the poor girl.

"Never mind, Amy. You did every thing for the best, I know. However hurt I may be, I am not so unreasonable but that I quite understand that. Now let us talk of something more agreeable. I am very glad to see you, my dear—very glad indeed, I can assure you. Do you remember me at all?"

"Yes, I remember a great deal about you," answered Amy shyly.

"That's right. I remember you very plainly. You were such a nice round little thing, and so good-tempered. And I'm afraid I used to try your temper a good deal."

"Did you?" said Amy, all on fire with blushes, "I forget that."

"Not purposely, you know, but I am sure I must have been a dreadful torment to you; elder sisters always are, I suppose. I remember once muffling you up till there was only the tip of your nose to be seen, that you might look like a sick old woman while I was the doctor."

"I think I remember something about it. And you had father's hat on, had you not?"

"What a capital memory you have!" cried Minna, warming with the subject. "Of course I had, and it was always slipping over my eyes and I was always pushing it up again. Oh dear! the longer I am here the more I seem to recollect it all. And do you remember playing at soldiers, and making ourselves a tent in the garden with a sheet and a couple of towel-horses? I was captain of course, and a very tyrannical one, I have no doubt. And do you remember?" . . .

Et cetera, et cetera.

It was wonderful what a fruitful topic these reminiscences proved, and how quickly it put the two sisters on friendly terms with each other in spite of the younger one's shyness. The afternoon hours were whiled away with astonishing rapidity, the pleasant *tête-à-tête* talk being only interrupted occasionally when Amy went up

stairs to see if her father had need of her. These visits did not detain her long, for the invalid was so gruffly emphatic in declaring that he wanted nothing except to be left alone, that she was only too glad to beat a retreat.

But evening came, and with it a rude ending of Minna's enjoyment.

The sisters had just sat down to tea, and Minna was getting more confidentially disposed than ever in the soft evening twilight, when a step was heard on the gravel walk without, followed by a drumming of knuckles against the outer door.

"It is Captain Pullyn!" cried Amy joyfully, in answer to her sister's surprised look. "He always comes like that."

She rose eagerly and hurried into the passage to admit the visitor. Minna looked after her with dignified surprise; opening the house door was manifestly the duty of the woman in the kitchen.

The duty was performed by Amy nevertheless, and immediately afterward Minna heard a heavy footstep scuffling in the passage, and a boisterous bass voice demanding—

"Well, lass, and how's father getting on?"

"About the same since morning," Amy made answer. And then she whispered something about "Minnie" being in the parlor which elicited an exclamation of surprise from the newcomer, and made Minna's brows contract very visibly. What business had Amy to speak of her by her Christian name to a great coarse sailor with scuffling feet who called a young lady (or the sister of a young lady) "lass"? But she was considerably more shocked presently when the parlor door was thrown open, and the owner of the scuffling feet actually made his appearance in her presence. It seemed that the man was positively going to join them at tea! Really it was too bad. She knew that she had often sat at the same table with him in by-gone days (indeed she had horrid visions of having sat on his knee), but things were very different now. Besides, he was so much more vulgar than she had had any idea of then! Surely he must have changed very much.

She had hardly had time to make this reflection when to her horror she discovered that he was advancing toward her with both hands extended.

"Hollo, Minnie! is this really little Minnie? Here's a sight for sore eyes if ever here was one. Bless your heart, my little lass, I'm as pleased to see you as land after a twelve months' cruise."

She had no choice but to put out her hand, which she did very daintily and gingerly. He grasped it with such rude energy as almost to crush the delicate fingers, and then, still holding it, stood looking at her for a few seconds with an air of irresolution which, if such an idea had not seemed too incredibly absurd to be entertained for an instant, would have made her believe that he was thinking of kissing her. She could not seriously give him credit for contemplating such an enormity, but felt frightened and angry notwithstanding, and pulled away her hand with an abruptness which appeared to give him some surprise. He recovered in a moment, however, and put a chair for himself at the table next to hers with immovable good-humor.

"Ah! very well, very well, it's what we old folks have to look out for. You don't remember me after all these years, I dare say."

"Very little, I confess," said Minna, frigidly.

What an atrocious thing it was that she should be expected to associate with this common seafaring creature! Her father was her father, and her sister was her sister, but what earthly claim had this vulgar leviathan of the deep to her consideration?

"Oh! you do a little, do you? Well so you ought, for you and I was fast friends once, reglar consort crafts. And I've always stuck by you, little Minnie—ay that I have, and fought your battles for you when you've been far enough from thinking of the poor old cap'en. For a ship will go as she's steered, and so will a youngster, and if either of 'em gets out of their course, it's the fault of them as keeps the log. That's my point of view, and being so, I've always said that you was to pity and not to blame, and say it I always will if I live a thousand years. I've felt for you, little Minnie, if nobody else has."

Felt for her indeed! What an odious man! And how fearfully he had made the room smell of tobacco! Minna was too much displeased to vouchsafe an answer—displeased not only with the captain himself, but with Amy, who, in evident unconsciousness of his demerits, had lit the candles in his honor and was complacently pouring him out a breakfast cup full of tea as for a welcome and privileged visitor.

Perhaps the captain perceived that his advances were not responded to, for his next words were addressed to the younger sister.

"I wonder what wind is keeping Joe. This is an early evening with him at the counting-house, and he don't stop away when he can help it, I know that."

Here the captain closed one eye by way of preparation for a noisy sip of his tea, and this time Amy appeared to discover the vulgarity of his manners, for she made no answer and slightly colored.

"It's my son," said the captain, turning toward Minna to explain. "He's a neighbor of yours, is Joe; that is, he lives at St. Austin's when he's at home, more's the pity, but he makes a run across once or twice a week when he gets away early enough. He's a clerk with Brown Brothers, and—Hollo! that's him."

A gentle ring sounded at the door-bell, and again Amy rose to answer the summons, leaving the captain to entertain Minna by telling her how capitally well Joe was doing. Minna was polite enough to answer the man with a remark that it must be very gratifying, but was inwardly chafing at being left alone with him. It seemed to her that Amy was never coming back. And certainly Amy was longer away on this occasion than on the former one.

At last she returned, looking a little flurried by the increasing cares of hostess-ship, and followed by a stalwart young man, muscular and large-limbed, but withal so rosy-faced and smelling so strongly of pomatum that nobody could be in his company without feeling confidence in his entire harmlessness.

He was evidently dressed in his best, and the result was a general glossiness which contributed still farther to the inoffensiveness of his aspect. His shirt-front was expansive and very highly glazed; his waistcoat, across which meandered a chain of brightly burnished yellow metal, was of the shiniest black satin; his boots were so

well polished that you could almost have seen yourself in them; his hair was lustrous with the pomatum aforesaid; his very face was radiant, partly with natural good-humor, but also perhaps with recently applied soap. The splendor of his appearance was slightly marred for the first few moments by three or four parcels which he carried as he entered, and which he evidently did not quite know how to get rid of.

"It is a pot of calves'-foot jelly for Mr. Har- oldson," he explained, blushing. "And—and a few oranges and macaroons that I thought might be tasty for him. Shall I put them down here? I beg your pardon, miss."

The last words were addressed with an embarrassed bow to Minna, as an apology for having been so long without noticing her. She returned the greeting with the slightest possible inclination of the head. She was afraid that this dreadful young man might try to claim acquaintance with her at St. Austin's, and was determined to keep him at a proper distance.

"Aha! we've got a visitor, you see, Joe," said the captain, with his horrid obtrusive joviality. "Who do you think it is? Who do you think it is?"

"Amy—Miss Amy—told me," said Joe, stammering in evident awe of the elegant stranger. "Very glad to see you, miss, I'm sure."

Minna answered by another inclination of the head. She was thinking that if Amy had had common sense and right feeling, this would not have happened. Why could not the servant, or charwoman, or whatever she was, have been instructed to say "Not at home" for that evening?

There was rather an awkward hiatus in the conversation, during which Minna felt the captain's eyes observantly fixed on her. She was afraid that he was going to make her another of his odiously familiar speeches, and was glad when he turned to his son and asked—

"Well, Joe, any news this evening?"

And this time there was no obtrusive joviality in his voice, but rather a slight, almost imperceptible, tone of sadness.

"Nothing particular, thank you," said Joe, nervously twitching at the corner of the bag of oranges which he had deposited on the table. He was still standing, being apparently at a hopeless loss to know how he should dispose of himself.

"Won't you sit down?" said Amy, discovering his embarrassment and looking up at him shyly.

"Thank you, I will," and Joe, much relieved, dropped down into a vacant chair by the little hostess's side, with a deprecating glance, however, directed to Minna first of all. It was very plain that he regarded her as a wet blanket.

"It was so very kind of you to think of bringing these things for father," said Amy in her low sweet voice.

"Nonsense," said Joe, in rather a low voice also. And as Joe spoke he smiled—perhaps to neutralize the apparent discourtesy of the word—and Amy, happening to catch his eye, smiled too. Minna noticed this bit of by-play, and thought it very unbecoming.

"You will take a cup of tea?" asked Amy, recovering herself.

"Yes, please—if you can spare it," said Joe, recovering himself likewise.

"Joe never refuses a cup of tea here," put in the captain.

At which Joe giggled unmeaningly, and Amy smiled again, though what there was to smile at Minna could not for the life of her make out.

Amy poured out a cup for Joe, and handed the captain his second; and then came a long uncomfortable interval during which every body was stirring his or her tea and no word was said. Minna was too proud, and Joe and Amy too shy, for conversation; while Captain Pullyn, though neither proud nor shy, was unwontedly non-hilarious since he had given up trying to draw out Minna.

"Fine day this has been," he remarked at last, by way of endeavoring to cheer up. It was not often that the captain found himself reduced to so commonplace a topic as the weather, but the difficulty of making conversation on the present occasion was probably too much for him.

"Beautiful," assented Joe. Then, gathering courage, he ventured on an original remark to the effect that the days were beginning to lengthen out famously.

"I am so fond of the long days," murmured Amy.

"But every season has its pleasures," observed Joe.

"Leastways for young folks like you and Amy," said the captain.

Again they both tittered in unison, to Minna's extreme scandal.

"You really do like warm weather best, though, don't you, Amy?" demanded Joe earnestly—"don't you, Miss Amy, I mean?"

Here was the second time that this horrid young man had called Amy by her Christian name. Each time, indeed, a slip of the tongue had apparently been committed, but the fact that such slips of the tongue were possible showed that there must have been on Amy's part a sad want of dignity.

"I think I do," said Amy in answer to Joe's question.

"That shows a warm climate would be the very thing for you," said Joe in an undertone, not low enough, however, to escape Minna's perplexed ears. Neither did it escape Minna's eyes that Amy shook her head slightly and immediately became very red.

"You will take another cup, won't you, captain?" said Amy, turning from Joe rather abruptly.

But in strange contradiction to his wont, the captain declined the offer. Apparently he was no longer able to bear up against the depressing influence of Minna's stateliness, for, after twiddling a few moments thoughtfully with his tea-spoon, he pushed away his chair from the table and rose to take his departure.

"Good-bye, Amy lass. I'll come again to-morrow. You can tell your father I'm glad he's better."

It was quite in opposition to the captain's habits to leave his friend's house so early when he was once installed in it; but, perhaps for the same reason that he chose to go, Amy did not seek to detain him.

Joe rose also, though more hesitatingly than his father, and made an awkward bow to Minna by way of leave-taking. She acknowledged it with another of her frigid inclinations of the

head, and was preparing to bow off the captain in a similar manner, when, to her surprise, the old man came up and took her hand before she knew what he was about.

"Good-bye, Minnie. I may never see you again, p'raps, but while I'm alive, I'm always your friend if you want *one*. God bless you, poor child, and take care of you."

Minna was a little touched by the old sailor's persistent friendship, in spite of the strange compassionateness of look and voice with which the last words were uttered, and which she thought uncalled for in the extreme. But before she had found any thing to answer, he had passed out of the room, and Joe after him.

Amy followed with a light to show the visitors out. Perhaps it was because Minna was in an impatient mood, but it again seemed to her that Amy stayed rather long, certainly longer than was absolutely necessary for merely shaking hands and saying "Good-night."

CHAPTER XIX.

AMY'S TROUBLE.

"WHAT vulgar people those are!" remarked Minna, when at last Amy had returned to her, and the two sisters found themselves alone again.

The speech was unkind as well as rude, for Minna knew perfectly that, whatever might be the deficiencies of the captain and his son, Amy was not cognizant of them. But Minna was not in a kind mood just now, or perhaps she thought that true kindness consisted in opening her sister's eyes to what was what.

Amy crimsoned suddenly, and held her head very low as she answered in a pained, subdued voice—

"They are very old friends. And have always been exceedingly kind to us."

"Oh! I have no doubt they are worthy people enough. It is only a pity they should be so dreadfully common."

Amy said nothing, and Minna paused a few moments in uncertainty as to whether or not she should pursue the subject. She knew that what she was thinking of saying might hurt Amy's feelings; but the question was, would it not be her duty to say it? The consciousness of her own infinitely superior wisdom and knowledge of the world inspired her with a sense of almost maternal responsibility toward this ignorant inexperienced young thing who had grown up with nobody to take care of her or give her counsel. As usual in such cases of hesitation, the spirit of exhortation prevailed, and, as delicately as possible, she began—

"Amy, dear, I hope you will excuse what I am going to say, but I am your sister, you know, and have perhaps a right to advise you. I was rather vexed, dear, just now, to notice that young man calling you by your Christian name, and—and sitting next you, and laughing, and all that kind of thing. I think you had better be a little more distant with him for the future, for I am sure you must see that he is very vulgar, and if you let him go on in that way, people may take it into their heads that—that you like him, in fact, or he may think so himself for that matter; young men are so conceited. It

is not every body who knows he is such an old friend, you see, dear, and I'm sure you would not like it to get about that—that there was any thing between you and him."

In considerate regard for her sister's feelings, Minna had delivered this sage matronly counsel with eyes demurely cast down, but, receiving no answer, she ventured at last to lift them. Amy was sitting with her face turned aside, but her neck and so much of her cheek as was visible were glowing like heated coals. At the sight an idea that had never yet occurred to her flashed across Minna's mind, startling her very considerably. Could it be that there really was something between them? She looked again; it seemed to her that Amy was trembling.

"Amy!" she cried, seized with sudden penitence. "Dear Amy, I am afraid that without meaning it I have been very rude to you."

"No, no," said Amy, slipping her little hand into that which Minna held out to her. "It was kind of you—very kind, dear Minnie. Only" . . .

She put her other hand before her eyes, and turned away her burning face yet farther.

"Only what, dear? Is he really any thing to you then?"

Amy made no answer, but Minna felt the little hand shaking in hers, and knew that it was as she had guessed.

She was somewhat shocked at the discovery, there is no denying; but remorse at having wounded the feelings of one so incapable of retaliating in kind made her more disposed to indulgence than she might otherwise have been. After all, she argued with herself, the attachment was not so very unsuitable. It was not to be expected that Amy's ideas should be as hers, and Joe was doubtless a very excellent young man for his station in life. And, having come to this conclusion, she gave full way to her sisterly tenderness for Amy and the irrepressible feminine interest in a love affair.

"Dear Amy! My dear sister! Don't be afraid of telling me, dear. And has he spoken to you about it? Is any thing settled? Does my father know?"

Amy bowed her head very low, and whispered—
"Of course we told father at once. We—we are engaged, you know."

Engaged! The edge of Minna's sentimental interest in her sister's love was a little blunted by hearing that its course had run so smoothly. Joe as the object of a romantic and perhaps unhappy attachment of which she should be the confidante was rather interesting than otherwise; but Joe as her brother-in-law was not interesting at all, and horribly undesirable. But for Amy's sake she strove to be as sympathizing as she could.

"Indeed! I had no idea. Well, dear, I do most sincerely trust that you may be very, very happy. And when is it to be? You must be sure to let me know, for I should not wish such an event to take place without sending you some little token of my remembrance and good wishes."

She determined she would do something very handsome for the young couple—give them a twenty pound note, perhaps, to begin housekeeping with; in their station money would doubtless be more acceptable than money's worth.

"You are very good," said Amy in a low

trembling voice. "But—but—it will not be for a long time—a very long time. He is going out to Ceylon first, and will be years and years away."

"My poor girl!" cried Minna with a new accession of sympathy. "Going to Ceylon—how is that?"

"Brown Brothers have got another house in Ceylon," said Amy simply, relating the fact as though it had been the most pathetic in the world. "All the clerks are sent out there in turn that they may learn every thing about the business, and his turn comes next summer. Of course we ought to think it a very good thing, for he'll have a great rise, and he gets very little here, not nearly enough to—to keep more than himself on, or he wouldn't go. But it seems dreadful to part for so long."

Having once broken the ice, the poor girl was getting quite confidential under the influence of Minna's encouraging kindness.

"It is a great pity," condoled Minna, on her part a good deal moved by her sister's increasing frankness. "But why can't you go out with him, dear?"

Why not indeed? And they might like Ceylon so much, and get on so nicely, that they might wish to stay there always; and the awkward question of the vulgar brother-in-law would be quite disposed of.

"That's just what he wants," said Amy, plucking nervously at her apron. "Oh! he has talked to me about it till I have been quite miserable. But I think he understands now it is no good."

"But why, Amy dear, why? I should have thought it was the very thing."

"Father's got nobody but me to take care of him," answered Amy with sudden firmness. "It wouldn't suit him to live out of England at his time of life, and I'll never go away to leave him alone, never."

"Oh! I see. Dear Amy, how good you are! Well, I can only hope that some day you may reap the reward of it all, and that young Mr. Pullyn may come back in due time as prosperous and well-to-do as you can wish."

"Thank you—I hope so," said Amy, plucking at her apron again. "But nobody knows what may happen, and sometimes I think . . . Oh! dear Minnie, don't be angry with me" (the poor little thing here put up her apron and sobbed behind it). "He is to be away so long, you know, and sometimes I think that perhaps—perhaps it will never be at all."

Minna was deeply touched; and taking her little sister in her arms, comforted her very kindly. Perhaps her consolation was given a little too much in the tone of a fond parent soothing a child for the breakage of a doll or for some other imaginary sorrow; and certainly the prospect of not marrying Joe could hardly be supposed to look a serious calamity in Minna's eyes. But Amy felt the kindness a great deal more than the superciliousness, and was very grateful indeed. It was a real luxury for her to have some one to whom she might without indiscretion confide her griefs and fears and all the thousand little secrets of her loving heart—no less real a luxury than it was for Minna to find some one to soothe, caress, and shed tears with. Neither of the girls had ever had a confidante be-

fore, and the pleasure was enhanced by its novelty.

That evening made the two sisters very intimate. They sat together far into the night, giving and receiving confidences; and, when at last they parted on the threshold of Minna's bed-chamber, it was with a strong impression on each side that it was very nice to have a sister.

CHAPTER XX.

CONVERSION OF OLD-CLOTHESMEN.

BUT however pleasant the sisters found each other's society, fate seemed to have willed it that their paths in life should be separate, and in the morning it was time for Minna to go. She took leave of her father and of her sister with very different feelings. The former she saw as a matter of ceremony for a few minutes before going away; but he was still cross and irritable as on the previous day, expressing neither regret at her departure nor desire for her return, and altogether behaving so churlishly that she was glad to get out of his room before any high words had been spoken.

But from Amy she did not part without real regret and a very sincere wish to see more of her.

"It is impossible I should ever come here again under the circumstances," she said a little bitterly; you perceive yourself how unwelcome I should be. But if you ever happen to be over at St. Austin's, Amy dear, I shall be so glad if you will give me a call. Mamma—Aunt Fanshawe that is—is so kind; she will not object, I am sure. You will try to come, won't you, dear?"

"I should like to see you, of course," said Amy, nervously. "Only it would make me feel so odd calling all by myself at such a fine house, and" . . .

"Nonsense, silly child, what is there to be afraid of? You won't see any body but me, you know; I'll take care of that."

The last words were spoken with some energy as she conjured up the possibility of Amy being seen by any one on the Fanshawe visiting list. Yes, indeed, she would take care, and good care too.

"You shall be shown straight into my boudoir. I will give orders to the servants, so that there shall be no mistake. You will ask for Miss Fanshawe, remember, and you need not kiss me until we are alone and the door is shut. I should not like—I mean Aunt Fanshawe does not wish it known that I have any other relations. You understand, dear?"

"Yes, I quite understand," said Amy, holding down her head.

"That reminds me, I hope young Mr. Pullyn will be careful not to say any thing about me. You had better warn him, I think. Things come round so, you see, and though it isn't likely he knows any body personally who knows me (no indeed, nothing could be more wildly improbable, she thought, with an unconscious toss of the head), one can not be too cautious. You quite see that, don't you?"

"Oh yes, quite; but Joe will be very careful, I am sure."

"I am sure of it, too. And now, good-bye,

my dear, sweet little sister. It is settled then that you are to come and see me?"

"I will try," said Amy, as she returned her sister's kiss.

It doubtless argued a great want of proper spirit to make such a promise, but poor Amy had no proper spirit—only a soft, loving little heart.

With this understanding, and many embraces and endearments, the girls parted, and Minna took the way toward home, full of tender thoughts of her newly discovered sister.

Gradually, however, as she drew near her journey's end, these thoughts, like the outlines of a dissolving view in the act of change, became more and more broken and disjointed, and at last were supplanted altogether by a new set of mental images. She was going from Amy and Hollsworth, she was going to the bazaar in St. Cecilia's Hall and the possibility of meeting Raymond Lee; and naturally enough her meditations traveled in the same direction. By the time she reached her aunt's house her mind was busied very much as it would have been if no such person as Amy had existed—with speculations as to the likelihood of Mr. Lee being at the bazaar, as to what he would say to her if he were, as to what his presence there would prove, and also as to what it was most expedient that she should wear for the occasion.

Her aunt did not trouble her much with questions as to her Hollsworth experiences, instinctively feeling, perhaps, that the subject was too delicate for discussion; so that, even when arrived at home, Minna was able to give herself up to the natural course of her reflections with very little interruption. When at last the fashionable hour came for going out, and Mrs. Fanshawe's grand carriage drove off in the direction of St. Cecilia's Hall, the feelings of one of its occupants were wrought up to a high pitch of excitement and expectation.

The Bazaar in Aid of the Conversion of Old-Clothesmen in the Metropolis Fund had long been looked forward to by the fashionable world of St. Austin's as one of the great events of that year's season; and certainly the combination of sights and sounds which St. Cecilia's Hall presented as Mrs. and Miss Fanshawe now entered it was calculated to justify the anticipations of the most sanguine.

There were strains of music, and streaming scarlet banners with white mottoes, and many colored stalls piled with gay nicknacks, and in the vacant spaces a slowly perambulating mass of silks and muslins and bright ribbons, with here and there a foil of black broadcloth. There were rich draperies that rustled with every movement of their wearers, and the murmur of low-voiced flirtations, and smirks and nods and handshakings, and exclamations of recognition, and bright young faces, and old ones made up to look their best, and sweet commingling of perfumes that came and went in faint breaths, and every body declaring that the bazaar was a great success.

Minna made the remark also as she moved down the middle of the Hall with Mrs. Fanshawe, but somehow she did not feel quite sure about it. The place was swarming with visitors—she saw that; and yet it made an impression on her as of comparative emptiness and solitude. The music, the decorations, the company, the amateur

saleswomen and their counters—all were of first-rate quality and get-up; still she had a feeling that there was a deficiency somewhere, though what it was exactly that was wanting she did not know. She knew very well, however, that she did not see Mr. Lee. Perhaps he was not coming at all.

"Miss Fanshawe," said a rich full-toned voice behind her.

She had not heard that voice often, but she knew it instantly. She turned and saw Mr. Lee standing at her side, and all at once the scene around her became invested with dazzling splendor. The success of the bazaar was past a doubt.

"How do you do? Mamma, here is Mr. Lee."

It was all she could say in the confusion of finding herself so suddenly accosted, and even these few words were spoken with a certain quivering of the voice which she could only hope would not be observed by any body but herself. And yet the agitation of the moment did not deprive her of the power of drawing logical conclusions.

"He must care for me, or he would never have come here after what he said about bazaars."

As she thought thus, a sense of wild elation came over her, and the notes of the fashionable waltz played by the band sounded like strains from fairy-land.

Minna might have been more elated still could she have guessed the intensity of distaste for society and its shams which Raymond had to overcome in visiting St. Cecilia's Hall that day. He was so altogether unaccustomed to the kind of thing he saw there that he was as much disgusted with it as a Hindoo with a European dancing-party. He took life too seriously to have any patience with the elegantly dressed ladies who were playing at keeping shop, and whose rings and bracelets would have realized a larger sum for the Conversion of Old-Clothesmen or any other object in which they were interested than the whole contents of their stalls. He was irritated by the tinsel decorations and the trashy music, and asked himself how those people, if they really cared two straws for what they pretended to care about, could reconcile so egregious a misappropriation of funds to their consciences. Even the flirtations and the smirking and nodding offended him as being so much pleasure taken under false pretenses. He had no sympathy with the Old-Clothesmen's cause—rather the reverse; but he was scarcely less indignant to see it so outrageously robbed and defrauded by those empty-headed triflers who made it a cloak for their own amusement than if it had been the object nearest his heart. As he wandered among the frivolous rose-water-blooded crowd, piloting his way with difficulty among the dresses of the ladies, and lighting on no face that was familiar to him, he felt more misanthropical than ever he had felt in his life before. He hated them all—the heavy dowagers, the simpering daughters, the brainless young men that danced attendance on them—hated himself for coming where such people congregated. What had possessed him to think of such a thing? Was he turning mad, or imbecile, or both?

Presently he came up with Miss Fanshawe, and he questioned himself no longer.

"Is it not a delightful bazaar?" said Minna,

who had had time to recover himself while Mrs. Fanshawe was shaking hands with Raymond and asking him if he had been here long—a question which for some inscrutable reason or other is always asked on such occasions. “Is it not a delightful bazaar? I am sure you must say it has been well got up, though I know you disapprove it on principle.”

“You have thought it worth while to remember that?” asked Raymond. It was very agreeable to him to find that she remembered any thing he had said.

“Of course I remember it. And I dare say there is a great deal in your argument—I have been thinking over it, and have quite come to that conclusion. Only there is no denying that this bazaar in particular is a very pleasant one, and that it is very nice to be here. You admit that, don’t you, Mr. Lee?”

“Certainly I do,” he answered, and though a few minutes before he had found every thing about him insufferably dull and tedious, what he said now was quite true. It seemed to him as if he could stand forever listening to her silvery-voiced prattle and watching the varying expression of her bright face.

But before another word could be said on either side, the conversation was interrupted by a female voice chiming in—

“Mrs. Fanshawe and Minna! I am so delighted. Have you been long here? I beg your pardon, Mr. Lee, I am very glad to see you. You naughty people, what do you mean by not having paid my stall a visit before this? Where is it? oh! quite close—round the corner here. Arabella is in charge just now, poor girl; I was obliged to go and take a trifle of refreshment—I think I should have dropped in another minute if I had not. Oh yes! very fatiguing work—perfectly killing. If it was not for an absorbing sense of duty, I never could stand a bazaar. I remember last year I held a stall in this very place at a bazaar for—for . . . dear me, I forget now what it was for. But I know I was dreadfully ill, and that nothing could have kept me up but an overpowering interest in the object. Well, I must go back now—I must not leave it all to poor Arabella. Oh! she is very delicate, I can assure you—very delicate indeed. Nay, but I must insist on your coming with me—and you too, Mr. Lee—you are all my prisoners. Who can one expect to patronize one if not one’s friends? This way, please—we are close upon it. I am so very glad to have met you.”

With these words Mrs. Vesey marshaled the party round to the place where Arabella, decked out in her sweetest smiles and her best bonnet, was presiding at a large and well-stocked counter. Raymond went too because he did not very well know how to refuse without being rude, and he did not wish to be rude to a friend of the Fanshawes. But he was very angry as he followed, and felt that he hated Mrs. Vesey with remarkable thoroughness. The woman jarred disagreeably on his nerves. He would almost sooner not have met Minna to-day at all than that the cold shade of worldliness and conventionality as represented by Mrs. Vesey should have thus come between them.

Mrs. Fanshawe and Minna made a purchase or two as was expected of them, and then it was Raymond’s turn to be attacked.

“What shall it be, Mr. Lee? A cigar-case—this is a very pretty one, see how beautifully the flowers are embroidered—or a smoking-cap, or a purse, or a pair of slippers? This pair would exactly fit you, I think, and the work is lovely. Shall we say the slippers, Mr. Lee?”

“I don’t want any of them,” said Raymond rather surlily, provoked alike by his enemy’s importunity and by the insipid nature of the proffered wares. What did he want with embroidered cigar-cases or smoking-caps or worked slippers or other such effeminate trash? “I would sooner pay twice the price to be rid of them.”

“Oh! Mr. Lee, how can you say such a thing? Dear, dear! how dreadfully hard you are to please. Let me see, what shall I tempt you with?”

“I don’t want to be tempted, thank you.”

“Oh! but I can’t let you go away without contributing something to the cause—I can’t indeed.”

“If I cared for the cause I would give to the cause without seeking my reward in a pair of slippers, even if I wanted them. But, as it happens, I don’t care for one or the other.”

“What do you care for then? I must find out. This exquisite little vase for a chimney ornament? Or stay—this pair of hand-screens—only two guineas the pair, and so useful, you know.”

Raymond eyed the baubles with supreme contempt.

“Useful!” he ejaculated. And then he opened his purse and took out a sovereign which he laid before Mrs. Vesey. “Here is my subscription to the cause, but I don’t want any chimney ornaments.”

He could not bear the Fanshawes to think it was the money that he grudged.

“Oh! Mrs. Vesey, do you actually appraise those unfortunate hand-screens of mine at two guineas?” asked Minna. “That is very complimentary.”

She wanted to see if it would make any difference to Raymond’s views to hear that the despised hand-screens were hers.

“You are very kind, Mr. Lee. I will take charge of your subscription with a great deal of pleasure. The smallest contributions thankfully received—he! he! Oh! my dear, I don’t think two guineas a bit too much to ask for them—considering it is for charity, you know. Mrs. Wilks has set the same price on the pair you did for her; in fact we consulted together about it first of all, for, the articles being so exactly alike, we thought it best that there should be no difference in the price. Have you seen Mrs. Wilks yet?”

“No,” said Mrs. Fanshawe, “I have just been wondering that we have not. Where is she?”

“Oh! such a dreadfully out-of-the-way corner as they have given her, poor woman. The farthest stall under the left hand gallery is hers—quite buried, you see. But she has so little manner, poor thing—it is just as well, perhaps. You are sure you won’t have the screens, Mr. Lee? They are great beauties.”

“Quite sure, thank you,” said Raymond, shrinking back.

He would have held it a kind of sacrilege to let the woman see that he had changed his opinion of the screens in consequence of what he had heard. But in point of fact he wished that he

had known that which he now knew when they were originally offered to him—that is, if Mrs. Vesey and the Fanshaws could have been ignorant of his knowledge.

Minna noted Mr. Lee's answer very carefully, and was conscious of wishing somewhat bitterly that hand-screens had never been invented.

"Oh! mamma, look!" she cried enthusiastically, for she was glad of the opportunity of flying off at a tangent. "Mrs. Simpson and all the girls. How do you do, dear? I am so glad to see you."

Instantly she and Mrs. Fanshawe were surrounded by a sea of silks and crinolines, and Raymond fell back some steps, filled with the profoundest aversion for the Simpson party, which consisted of a full-faced matron and three red-cheeked young ladies.

"Well, this is a pleasure!" said the elder lady. "Have you been long here? A beautiful bazaar, is it not? Which way are you going? oh! it is all the same to us—only too glad to have the pleasure of your company."

The younger ladies were equally gushing.

"So nice to have met each other, isn't it dear? I was just saying to Maria how delightful it would be to have Minna with us, and at that very moment Fanny said, 'There they are.' I was so pleased."

Raymond understood that Minna was regularly taken possession of by these people, and lost all care for remaining longer in her company for that day. It was no pleasure to him, but rather a positive pain, to be near her when she was surrounded thus, by wordlings whom he longed to drive away from her, but with whom—they not being visibly burglars or foot-pads, or otherwise disreputable, and he being no more than the newest of her acquaintances—he had no right to interfere. He made his way round to Mrs. Fanshawe, muttered something about an engagement, shook hands with her, bowed to Minna across a vacant space left between the young ladies' bonnets, and in another moment was lost to sight in the crowd.

Minna walked on with the Miss Simpsons, admiring alternately the music, the stalls, and the decorations, and laughing and talking in apparently the highest spirits. But somehow, in spite of her enthusiasm for every thing that she saw, she had a secret feeling that the bazaar was after all a failure.

One of the last stalls the party visited was that at which the presiding goddess was Mrs. Wilks, a fat good-natured woman whom Minna rather liked, but thought herself very benevolent for liking. The poor lady in her out-of-the-way corner had done a very bad business that day, and bewailed her ill-fortune bitterly.

"Such nice things as I have got, too, and such pains as I have taken to set them out well! But people can't sell if there's nobody to buy, and it isn't to be expected that they should. There is one thing I'm glad of, my dear; I have sold those pretty hand-screens of yours. I was afraid the price would be too much, but no—the gentleman put down the money at once, and seemed very glad to have them."

Minna laughed rather constrainedly.

"A gentleman! What a funny gentleman, to buy hand-screens! I suppose he had a wonderfully fair complexion, as he was so careful of it."

"No, my dear, quite the contrary—very dark, I should say. But no doubt his wife or his sister had commissioned him; I could not get him to look at any thing else."

"How odd!" laughed Minna.

After this she became very silent, only remarking to her companions, as they came away from the stall, what a nice person Mrs. Wilks was.

Decidedly the bazaar had not been a failure.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOE'S TROUBLE.

IF Raymond Lee could have had any idea of the prominent place he occupied just now in Minna's thoughts, he would have been spared a great deal of unpleasing and bitter rumination.

He knew (as how could he help knowing?) that she—this bright beautiful girl with whom a strange freak of his hitherto dull destiny had made him acquainted—had suddenly come to count for a great deal in his life. He knew that he felt an undefinable hungering for her presence which drove him to seek it against his own better judgment; he knew that in her absence he could not help musing on her, and working her image into the web of his waking and sleeping dreams till the whole texture of his inner existence was changed from what it had been. But when he considered what he must seem in her eyes, he could not imagine the possibility of her feeling any thing like a corresponding interest in him, and told himself he was a fool to think of her. Young and fair and radiant as she was, how was it conceivable that she should be attracted toward him—a man so much older than herself, unable even in her presence to appear other than grave and stern as care and disappointment had made him (he little guessed that for her his gravity and sternness constituted one of his chief attractions)—a man whose time-ingrained habits and mode of life rendered him of another world than that in which she had been accustomed to move. In himself he saw the very antipodes of all the qualities which attracted him in her, and did not understand how she could find aught of interest in what was so utterly unlike that which had power over him.

And then, over and above the sense of his personal disqualifications, he had constantly with him an uneasy remembrance of the infamy resting on his father's name and reflected on his own. If it were possible to believe that she might gradually grow to feel for him some of that kindness which he coveted, might not his inherited disgrace be in itself enough to turn the scale against him?

But in spite of an inward assurance that he was only preparing for himself disappointment more bitter than any he had yet known, he could not resist the secret impulsion which made him desire to see Minna, even at the cost of seeing her in the midst of surroundings that he held in abhorrence. The circumstances that had attended their meeting at the bazaar—the frivolous crowd, the sham of the charity and genuineness of the tinsel, the interposition of the Vesey and the Simpsons—had made the occasion one of almost more pain to him than pleasure; and yet when it was over he sought other such occasions

under circumstances equally repugnant to him. Thus, within the two or three weeks following the day of the bazaar, he had obtained a bow from Miss Fanshawe more than once on the long terrace which was the great resort of fashionable promenaders and which he had hitherto avoided like the plague, had exchanged a few words with her at a flower-show which he despised himself for attending, and had helped her with her cloak (very awkwardly) in the vestibule of a concert-room where the best music had been played to an audience who seemed to think it of vital importance that they should listen in their best things. For Mrs. Fanshawe, who under slightly different conditions would have made things easy to him by getting up friendly little dinner and tea parties, at which he should have unlimited opportunities of talking to the young lady of the house, had reasons of her own for not assisting him just at present.

As has been seen, her ambition for her adopted daughter soared very high; and the fact of the matter was that she waited to see what might happen at that grand *fête* in Fitz-John Park, at which a young lord was to be the host, before giving any specific encouragement to an untitled aspirant for Minna's hand.

So that, for a single glimpse of the original of the bright face that haunted his visions, Raymond had to go through an ordeal which was more irksome to him each time he underwent it; and the worst was that he was only rewarded by seeing Minna through an atmospheric medium that made her appear a great deal farther off than when merely material distance divided them. And yet, unsatisfactory as even success always was, he could not keep himself from trying to get a sight of her occasionally. He felt a wild chivalrous desire to rescue her if he could from the contact of the coarse earthly-minded men and women of the world among whom she was thrown and with whom she looked as incongruously associated as a nymph held prisoner by satyrs. And then, besides, he sometimes fancied that when they met she seemed pleased.

He longed to put an end to his suspense by an open declaration of what he felt, but not even when she had looked at him most kindly did he find courage to risk the explanation which was to decide so much. The idea that perhaps he had a chance of winning her after all, made him indeed only the more cautious how he threw it away by undue precipitation. If he had been always and altogether desponding, he might have thought that it was good for him to know the worst at once; but, feeling a gleam of hope, he forbore all rash action, and remained anxiously quiescent, as one who, watching a beautiful bird flutter near him with less and less of fear, dreads to frighten it away forever by prematurely putting forth his hand.

Thus, unsatisfactorily enough, he lived on, knowing that his destiny was, and was to be, strongly influenced by another than his own, but not knowing whether he exercised any kindred influence over that other destiny in return, not even having any distinct idea as to when and how he should take steps to clear up his uncertainty. Yet, unsettled and uneasy as his life just now was, he had never before found it so interesting.

Meanwhile, in spite of all inner preoccupations

and distractions, he had been as punctilious as ever in the fulfillment of his external duties and obligations. Among these he had counted his promise to Captain Pullyn to seek out and renew acquaintance with the old school-fellow and *protégé* whose prospects, as he bitterly remembered, had been so cruelly marred by Walter Lee's treachery. And, having once seen Joe as Joe was now that he had arrived at man's estate, Raymond was not satisfied without seeing him many times again. Minna had discovered nothing save vulgarity in the poor youth, but this other observer looked beyond the vulgarity, and discerned a great many excellent qualities which commanded his strong liking and even friendship. To be sure, Raymond had adopted a very different mode of treatment with him from that pursued by Minna. His first object had been to set the good fellow as much as possible at ease by showing that he himself attached no importance to the accidents of his new friend's inferior social status and comparative lack of polish—how entirely accidental had been the latter, so far as Joe was concerned, Raymond remembered but too well. He wanted to make Joe at home with him, and he succeeded. In a very short time this shy, awkward young man had got to feel quite friendly with Mr. Lee, and to talk to him as freely as though their acquaintance had continued unbroken for years. And if his modes of expression were not always such as Raymond himself would have chosen, there was nothing in his conversation to denote any innate vulgarity of mind or heart.

One day Raymond had invited his former school-fellow to dine with him, and as the two were sitting over their wine the conversation fell on Joe's business prospects and his probable departure for Ceylon in the course of that year.

"A first-rate opening for you, Joe. Nothing like seeing the world for a young man of your age," said Raymond, who fancied that his guest was disposed to undervalue the advantages of his lot, and wished to put him on good terms with them.

"I suppose so. At least every body tells me the same thing. It's my want of enterprise not to care about it, no doubt," uneasily answered Joe, who had set himself to cut a bit of orange peel on his plate into the smallest possible fragments.

"Do you really not care about it, then? Joe, that is a great pity. A rise from one hundred a year to three, with the prospect of more in the background, is well worth making a sacrifice for; and as for living out of England for the next few years, it seems to me that a young man of spirit, with no tie to keep him at home . . ."

"There is my father, you know," put in Joe, fidgeting nervously on his chair.

"Your father does not see very much of you as it is. And when I was over at Hollsworth he seemed to think that five or six years in Ceylon would be the making of you."

"Five or six years don't look so long to him as to us—to me, I mean," said Joe, correcting himself in a great hurry and suddenly turning very red.

Raymond thought that the plural pronoun which had been so hastily retracted had included himself, and smiled—a little sadly perhaps—to find that the few years' difference in their ages

made such a gulf between them in the younger man's eyes.

"Oh! you won't find five years, or even ten, nearly so formidable as they look, I can assure you. I must not quote my own experience—you would not think that a case in point—but just count back five years of your own life, and tell me if the time appears so very long."

"I don't know that it does," said Joe, fidgeting again. "But that is a different thing altogether. I was not situated then as I am now."

"You are determined not to be convinced," said Raymond smiling.

Joe was silent for some moments. The orange peel was all chopped up now, and he was busy arranging the pieces into an elaborate pattern.

"You have been very kind to me, Mr. Lee," he began abruptly, before the pattern was quite completed, "and I don't see what call I have to keep a secret from you. I'm engaged to be married, Mr. Lee, and that's the truth of it, else I shouldn't care if you packed me off to the moon to-morrow. And she's the dearest, sweetest little creature, that it will break my heart to part from, pretty near, as you would say too if you saw her. That's the truth of it, Mr. Lee, and now you have it."

Having jerked out this confession in strange constrained tones which, in the effort not to betray any bashfulness, sounded almost defiant, Joe relapsed into silence again, and set himself to finish his pattern.

Meanwhile Raymond sat looking at his guest with quite a new feeling of interest. So Joe was in love—who would have thought it? And was to be separated from the object of his attachment. Raymond felt the most fervent pity for the poor young fellow.

"Is there no way but parting?" he asked after a pause. "You are engaged to this lady, you say? She loves you then—she will surely go with you."

"No, she won't," said Joe, shaking his head despondingly while he carefully put the last touch to his pattern. "Look here, Mr. Lee," he burst out suddenly, throwing off his shyness in the all-mastering excitement of the subject, and pushing away his plate with an impetus that shook the pieces of orange peel into chaos again. "Look here—she's the best, dearest, kindest little darling in the world, and that's the very identical reason it's no good asking her to have a bit of pity on me. She's got a father, Mr. Lee, that she says she'll never leave with no daughter to take care of him, and do what I will I can't make her say different. Though I can't help thinking Mr. Haroldson would do very well without her, and, as I tell her, my father would go and live with him, and they would be sure to be very happy together, for father and Mr. Haroldson were always the best of friends. Of course it's very true what she says, that my father isn't his daughter; but I don't see that there would be any such great difference, and when I think of having to go away without her, I feel fit to go out of my mind almost. Yes, Mr. Lee, that I do."

And as Joe spoke he actually brought down his fist on the table by way of emphasis, so completely had every vestige of shyness been swept away in the hurricane of his feelings.

Raymond was very sympathizing.

"My poor Joe! I am very sorry to hear all this. But I think you ought not to urge the young lady against her sense of duty. Wait patiently, and all will come right in the end. If you are sure of her love, a little waiting is no such great hardship," he added, with a touch of bitterness in his tone.

"Isn't it though, Mr. Lee? Ah! you don't know. She is such a darling—nobody who hasn't seen her can tell what a darling she is. You may partly understand that she must be next door to an angel by her being so fond of her father, and it isn't every body who could be fond of him, for, not denying he is a very nice man, he is apt to be uncommon hasty at times in his temper. And my poor girl—she never gives him call for it, goodness knows."

Joe was getting quite a flow of words in his enthusiasm for Amy's virtues.

"Her father is Mr. Haroldson, I think you said? He seems an eccentric man, certainly."

"He means well, you know," answered Joe quickly, reflecting that he had spoken about Amy's father in a way that Amy would not be likely to thank him for. "It's his troubles have soured his temper, I think; it isn't altogether his fault."

"I quite understand that," said Raymond in a low voice.

Joe was suddenly reminded of the awkwardness of his allusion, and his face all aflame with confusion, hastened to remedy the blunder by adding—

"I think it is fretting after his eldest daughter that has a great deal to do with it. His eldest daughter don't live with him, you know. When she was quite a little child, she went away from him to be brought up by some grand people here at St. Austin's who took a fancy to her (I must not mention names, for I've promised Amy not to), and I don't think he has ever rightly got over it. Ah! if she would only do her duty and come back to live with her poor old father, who would give any thing to have her, it would be all right with me and Amy then. But it's no good to talk about it," concluded Joe with a sigh, "she is a great deal too much of a fine lady for that."

"Too much of a fine lady to do her duty?" demanded Raymond sternly. He was naturally disposed to take severe views of duty, and this girl who preferred ease and fine-ladyism to the claims of a father that loved her and pined after her, seemed to him a flagrant transgressor.

"She wouldn't think it her duty, may be," said Joe, more practical in his views of human nature than his friend. "Though I can't but think myself that it is," he added lachrymously, as the recollection of his own trouble rose before him.

"Unquestionably it is her duty to go to her father if her father desires that she should. Does she know how strongly he feels about it?"

"I don't suppose she does exactly; he is too proud to let any thing of that sort show more than he can help. But bless you, it wouldn't make a bit of difference. If I thought it would . . . Do you think it would, Mr. Lee? Because I could write to tell her, you know, if it was to do any good, and explain at the same time how things are between me and Amy. But good gracious, it wouldn't be any use—I think I see how she would toss her chin up."

Joe shook his head, and relapsed into despondency.

"It might be worth a trial, in any case," said Raymond. "At least it would be giving the girl a chance of doing her duty."

"I'll think it over, Mr. Lee. But I'm afraid there's no good to be got, and it would be an uncommon difficult letter to write, you know. And I'm not quite sure either whether Amy would let me, though of course, as far as that goes, I needn't tell her till it's done. I'll think it over, Mr. Lee."

Here a servant entered with coffee, and the subject dropped for the evening, Joe being too shy to revert to it spontaneously, and Raymond desiring to avoid all appearance of seeking his confidence. But the conversation had left its impression behind it; and when Joe came away from his friend's house that night, he was thinking much of Minna and of what reception she was likely to give to such an appeal as Mr. Lee seemed to be in favor of.

Raymond was thinking of Minna, too, but exclusively in her character of Miss Fanshawe. As for the girl who was too much of a fine lady to do her duty by her old father, he forgot that such a person existed.

CHAPTER XXII.

LADY FITZ-JOHN'S FETE.

THE afternoon sun was shining brightly on the venerable old trees of Fitz-John Park and the venerable old front of Fitz-John Court, lighting up a busy scene where carpenters were at work among the rippling canvas walls of white shining marquees, and upholsterers were putting the last touches to the crimson covering of benches and platforms, and servants were hurrying over the lawn with piles of plate and porcelain. Inside the house was almost as much bustle as without. In the kitchen, where delicacies of all kinds were being prepared under the auspices of a French cook hired expressly for the occasion, in the cellars where the heavy-footed butler held solemn counsel with reverential subordinates, in my lady's room where an experienced maid sat sewing lace on my lady's new dress—everywhere the note of preparation sounded.

And yet not quite everywhere. There was one chamber in the house even on that busy afternoon where life was taken easily. This was a small room pleasantly placed on the second floor, where a lowered Venetian blind flapping lazily in the breeze made that luxurious *demi-jour* most favorable to idleness, and where a young man in dressing-gown and slippers, lolling on a sofa with a cigar in his mouth and a paper in his hand, seemed to be availing himself of the advantages of the situation to the utmost extent. If other people were inclined to kick up a row, this young man certainly was not. He had got hold of a good cigar and the best account of the recent prize-fight, and to every thing else he was for the time as stolidly indifferent as the ballet-girl whose gazelle-like and remarkably inexpressive eyes languished upon him from a large gilt frame on the opposite wall, or the pair of Derby winners by whom she was flanked on either side. The room was his lord-

ship's dressing-room, and the young man was his lordship himself, the host and hero of the coming entertainment.

Presently a tap sounded at the door, and the young man, without raising his eyes, opened his mouth to say "Come in." But instead of the valet whom he probably expected, there entered a tall lady with a commanding figure, and a face which had once been beautiful and was still handsome, though now marked by a pinched, anxious expression such as is produced by a long course of unsatisfactory mental arithmetic.

"What! it's you, mother?" said the smoker, looking up languidly as the rustle of feminine drapery caught his ear. "I'm not going to dress for another hour yet, so it's no good asking me. Confound it, you know how I dislike the whole thing."

"I know how you dislike most things which it is right and proper that you should like," replied Lady Fitz-John with stately bitterness. "But it is not necessary that you should dress yet, though I hope you will be ready in time to receive the earliest of your guests. I come to you now because I have a few words to say to you in private before the company assembles, and this may be my last opportunity of doing so."

She seated herself with slow-moving dignity, and her son let his paper drop with an air of sullen resignation.

"Well, mother, what is it all about? Another lecture, of course. I smoke too much to please you, I suppose."

"Certainly you smoke too much to please me, Albert. And if you cared at all about pleasing me, you would put down your cigar while I am speaking to you."

Lord Fitz-John had a heavy obdurate-looking lower jaw, and it protruded itself ominously at these words.

"Sorry I can't oblige you, but this is my own dressing-room, I believe. You are always preaching to me about economy; I wonder you want me to throw away a good cigar."

"Your behavior is very unbecoming, Albert, but I really have not energy to pursue the subject at present. What I have come to ask of you just now is that you will take a little pains to make yourself agreeable this evening. It will be the first time you have been seen in the neighborhood since you were a boy, and a great deal may depend on the sort of impression you produce."

"Very well. But I don't see how you make that out, mother. They can't raise the rate of interest on the mortgage because I produce a bad impression, can they?"

"No. But perhaps you can understand how by producing a bad impression you may lose a good opportunity of paying off the mortgage. You force me to speak plainly, Albert. The Honorable Miss Newtons are coming this evening. As you know, they are the co-heiresses of one of the best properties in the county. You will disappoint me very much if you do not treat them with particular attention."

The obdurate-looking lower jaw was again protruded.

"That depends on what they are like. I'm not going to make love to an ugly girl to please any one."

"They are very nice girls. They called here

with their mother last week while you were up in London, and I never saw two young ladies who appeared to me more amiable and accomplished."

"That means that they are as ugly as sin. And you want me to marry them both, do you?"

"That is a very indecorous jest, Albert. I wish you to pay attention to them both in the first instance, and I do not deny that I should be glad to see you ultimately marry the one of whom your heart may prompt you to make choice. I will not say which of them I would have you prefer. They are both very sweet girls, and there is nothing I more disapprove of than an attempt to force young people's inclinations."

"Ah! Is that all you have to say just now?"

"Yes, quite all. I hope you are going to oblige me."

"I'm not going to make love to an ugly girl, if that's what you call obliging you," said the young man sulkily, so absorbed in lighting a new cigar that he did not even trouble himself to look up.

"Oh! I might have known you would make no sacrifice only for the sake of obliging me. But I would have you remember that you have been wasting your property shamefully since you came of age, and that it is your duty to lose no opportunity that presents itself of repairing the mischief you have done. It seems to me that you owe something, if not to your mother, at least to your own position and the dignity of your family name."

"By Jove, I wish it was only them I owed any thing to."

"I wish so too, Albert, with all my heart. In a few months your extravagance has undone the result of years of economy and self-denial."

"Economy and self-denial! Why don't you speak English and call it screwing and pinching?"

"Screwing and pinching, if you will. I am not ashamed of it. Heaven knows that living on the estate would have been a great deal pleasanter to my feelings than letting it. But at least you have to thank my screwing and pinching for entering on an unencumbered property last year. If you had screwed and pinched a little since then in the indulgence of your pleasures, it would have been unencumbered still."

"Ah! but you see it isn't; more's the pity."

"It may be again, Albert, if you choose."

"As I said before, that depends. I'm not going to be dictated to. I say, it's about time you should be going to put on your uniform, isn't it?"

"It is nearly time for me to dress, if that is what you mean," answered Lady Fitz-John, rising with mournful dignity. "Well, I see you wish me to go, and I will not trouble you longer, but I do request that you give your serious attention to what I have said."

"We'll see about it," said the young man with a grunt, picking up his newspaper from the floor, and turning the pages to and fro till he had found his place. "But I'm not going to be dictated to. Ta, ta, mother."

Lady Fitz-John said no more, and left the room with a sigh.

Two hours had passed, and the invited guests were thronging thick and fast into Fitz-John Park.

The arrangements for their reception were now quite finished, commanding by their magnificence and completeness the admiration of all who looked. Lady Fitz-John, in spite of a long apprenticeship in economy, could do things in style when she chose, and this was one of the occasions on which she did choose. It seemed to her right and proper that something very grand should be done to celebrate the coming of age of a young lord; and though the self-willed young lord's absence on the Continent and in London had deferred the festivities till nearly a year after the event of which they were to be in honor, she seized the first opportunity of holding them, on the principle that it was never too late to perform an act of duty. The same instinct of orthodoxy that prompted the giving of an entertainment which could ill be afforded had determined also its *al-fresco* character. It might have been more convenient simply to have a ball in-doors, but Lady Fitz-John had a notion that on the occasion of a lord's majority there ought to be a disporting of faithful and devoted tenantry on the lawn, and a feasting of the same under tents. In the present case the tenants unfortunately had to be dispensed with, being too few to make a show by themselves, and too vulgar to be admitted to mix with the private friends of the family; but so much the stronger was the reason for adhering rigidly to the lawn and the tents.

The scene in the park when the greater part of the company was assembled was a very brilliant one. Lady Fitz-John, surveying it from the pretty little pavilion which she had for the time made her head-quarters, and where she stood surrounded by a select staff of her own more special acquaintances, felt a serene assurance that, be the bill what it might, she had at least met a great occasion in a spirit worthy of it. She had done her duty, and had nothing to reproach herself with. If only she could depend on her son doing his! She looked at him anxiously as he stood near her masking a yawn with his glove, and wondered uneasily what the Honorable Miss Newtons would think of him.

The Honorable Miss Newtons and their mother were presently seen wending their way toward the pavilion, and Lady Fitz-John, treating them with peculiar distinction, made a few steps forward to meet them.

"My dear Lady Amelia, what a pleasure this is! You are quite well, I hope? and your daughters? I am so glad to see you all. Will you allow me to introduce my son to you? Albert, my dear, where are you?"

Lord Fitz-John, being thus summoned, came slowly up and underwent the ceremony of introduction, but his mother saw only too surely that he was not in the mood for doing his duty. He looked first at one of the girls, and then at the other, and his heavy lower jaw took its most obdurate expression. He was not himself particularly good-looking, but he was as exacting in his ideas of female beauty as the handsomest of men could be; and neither the Honorable Miss Newton, who was freckled and sandy-haired, nor the Honorable Miss Sophia Newton, who was freckled and red-haired, came up to his standard.

His mother was afraid, not without reason, that he would endeavor to make his escape, and determined to hold him prisoner if she could.

"Suppose we go to table now? I am sure you must all feel the want of some refreshment after your long drive. Albert, will you give your arm to one of these ladies?"

The young man saw the trap that had been laid for him, and resented it. He cast a quick glance of rebellious defiance at his mother, and looked round, as though imagining that her request referred to a group of some half dozen ladies who stood behind him. In an instant he had singled out the most presentable of these, and advanced to offer her his arm. It happened that the person thus distinguished was Arabella Vesey.

Many and various were the internal and expressed comments of the spectators when Lord Fitz-John was seen escorting Miss Vesey into the long marquee set apart as banqueting-tent. His mother was angry enough to have pushed the young lady out of the Fitz-John territory with both hands, could she have perpetrated such a breach of hospitality with any kind of decorum. Lady Amelia Newton and the Honorable Miss Newtons put down their noble host as an ill-mannered brute; Mrs. Fanshawe laughed hysterically and remarked to her next neighbor that wonders would never cease; while Minna—consigned to the unsympathizing companionship of a stout elderly gentleman who was moreover married—said nothing, but inwardly protested that for her own part she could not imagine what any body could see in the girl. The other guests were more or less critical according to their respective temperaments; but it is a melancholy fact that of all present not one was thoroughly pleased with Miss Vesey's good fortune with the exception of the young lady herself and her mother. Of both these, however, it must be said that they were delighted beyond measure.

The feasting and the subsequent speech-making—for on such an occasion it was of course indispensable that the young lord's health should be drunk, and that the young lord, however briefly and ungraciously, should return thanks—occupied some time between them, so that, before they were over, the sun had set and the shades of evening began to close over the scene.

When at last the company emerged again into the open air, they found the park illuminated with colored lanterns hung among the trees, and saw a large and brilliant transparency in the act of being lighted up in front of a huge temporary erection of painted wood and canvas which stood at the bottom of the grounds. This was the dancing pavilion, for Lady Fitz-John, having a notion that a faithful and devoted tenantry, if such had been to be had, would have testified their loyalty by dancing on the green, was determined that dancing there must and should be—not perhaps exactly on the green, but in some place more rustic and makeshift in its character than the regular ball-room. Hither the steps of all the guests were now directed, and soon a goodly number of them were assembled in a large octagonal room with canvas sides, but otherwise with no rusticity about it, being faultlessly decorated and brilliantly lighted, and farther supplied with the services of a very excellent band.

Arabella Vesey still retained possession of Lord Fitz-John. She had talked a great deal, and had otherwise done her very best to create an impression; and though it was evidently not his

lordship's way to be demonstrative, she fondly flattered herself that she had succeeded. She marked his abstracted air as they stood together in the doorway of the dancing-room, and thought that he was considering how he should frame an invitation to her to be his partner in the first dance. But Miss Vesey was deplorably mistaken, for in truth his lordship was considering how he should best disencumber himself of her. He began to find her something of a bore—perhaps she had been a little too visibly anxious to make herself agreeable—and, besides, he had caught sight of a much prettier girl sitting some way above him at table in the banqueting-tent.

Presently Minna entered with the elderly gentleman who was her cavalier, and who, not dancing himself, made haste to emancipate her by leading her to a seat. Then it was that, to Miss Vesey's infinite surprise and disappointment, Lord Fitz-John gave a twirl to his mus-tache, and said—

"You must be tired of standing. Let me find a seat for you."

With which words Arabella found herself deposited on the nearest bench and left to her own meditations. In another moment she had the mortification of seeing the young lord stand before Minna Fanshawe, and Minna Fanshawe rise and put her arm within his. Minna was going to lead off the first dance with Lord Fitz-John.

It was the first time that Minna's hand had ever rested on a lord's coat sleeve, and she found the sensation vastly agreeable. She stole a furtive glance at her partner, and was obliged to admit to herself that he was not handsome—his eyes and mouth were too heavy, and his cheeks too swollen and puffy—and yet, in spite of this disparaging estimate, she could not help feeling profoundly grateful to him for having chosen her. It was so pleasant to stand up with him at the top of the room, with the consciousness that all present were looking at her, and that in a few days every body she knew would have heard how at the *fête* Lord Fitz-John had singled her forth from all others. And Mr. Lee would hear of it too, of course. What would he think of it?

The music was very loud, and, eloquence not being Lord Fitz-John's strong point, he did not make any attempt at conversation during the dance, beyond a remark, two or three times reiterated, that it was uncommonly hot; while Minna was too much oppressed by the novelty of her position, and the sense of being the cynosure of all eyes, to do more than attend to her steps and agree with him. But when the dance was over, and they were quietly promenading the room arm in arm, they both felt equal to higher conversational efforts.

"The worst of dancing is that it always makes a place so hot," observed his lordship, striking out a spirited variation of his thesis.

"It does indeed. And yet we ought not to feel too warm here; the room is so delightfully large and airy," answered Minna, anxious to show that she too could be original. She would have been glad to find some slightly more abstruse subject to dilate upon, but she was too nervous to improvise one on the spur of the moment; and, besides, she had a comfortable conviction that his lordship was not critical.

"Hum—yes—well enough considering. The

fact is, it would be hot anywhere such weather as this."

"The weather is getting very warm now, certainly. But it is what we must expect now, I suppose, and anything is better than the cold and wet we had last week."

"Confound it, yes—any thing better than that. Confound it, the rain last week cost me five thousand pounds if it cost me a penny."

"Indeed!" said Minna, wondering reverentially. "Ah! to be sure, so much rain must have injured the grain very much, I suppose."

Lord Fitz-John looked puzzled, and stroked his mustache thoughtfully.

"The grain! Oh! I see, I see—it's the crops you're thinking of. I don't know what it did to them, I'm sure, but I know it spoiled Miss Mary's running. Course cut up for all the world like a ploughed field."

"Oh indeed!" said Minna, "that was a pity." She dared not say more, not having any certainty as to who Miss Mary might be.

"Pity? I should think so. Ever see Miss Mary run? No?—ah!—great mistake that; finest filly in England I've always said, and I say so still. But the ground last week was as heavy as a soaked sponge. By the way, do you see The Conqueror's scratched?"

She began to have a notion that he was talking about racing, and answered with a light little laugh—she knew that she laughed very becomingly—

"Oh! I am the most unenlightened person in the world about such things. I was only at a race once, and then I did not understand a bit about it, except indeed that the horses were very beautiful, and as glossy as if they had just stepped out of one of Landseer's pictures. Are you a great admirer of Landseer?"

She wanted to get the subject shifted to pictures if she could, feeling that she understood them somewhat better than horses, and was a little disappointed when he went on—

"Landseer—hum—I don't know. What race was it you went to? Ah! no wonder you didn't like it; they never make good running there. Why, last year Old Nick walked over the course—walked over it, 'pon my honor he did, and between you and me Old Nick is no better than a screw."

Minna was getting to find the conversation rather tiresome. It was very nice of Lord Fitz-John to talk so much to her—very nice indeed, and she felt truly grateful to him for it; but how different he was from Mr. Lee! A much better lord Mr. Lee would make, certainly. He was so very intellectual, and this one did not seem intellectual at all—indeed quite stupid in comparison.

Her treasonable free-thinking had reached this point when suddenly the band struck up anew, and began playing a waltz. Minna was both glad and sorry; glad to be relieved from the necessity of carrying on a conversation she did not care about, and sorry that the season of her triumph was so near its close, for of course her partner must transfer his attentions to some other young lady now—perhaps back again to Arabella Vesey. But just as she was thinking thus, just as possibly his lordship was thinking thus too, Lady Fitz-John, near whom they were passing at the moment, touched her son's arm and uttered the one word—

"Albert!"

The remonstrance was spoken in a low voice—so low as to be heard by none save the person for whom it was intended; but its effect was instantaneous.

"Suppose we go in for this waltz?" he asked Minna.

She inclined her head, and in a moment more his arm was about her waist and the pair were whirling round the room, leaving Lady Fitz-John nothing less than dumbfounded at the unheard-of audacity of their conduct.

Minna was delighted, there is no denying it. Under ordinary circumstances she would have been scandalized at the solecism of dancing the two first dances of the evening with the same gentleman; but, as things were, she felt honored even beyond her deserts. Her partner's eyes were dull, and his complexion was tallowy, and she thought him rather stupid than otherwise; and yet she was proud that all should see him dancing with her. Poor Minna!—she had not been accustomed to dance with lords. And then did she not know that every other young lady in the room, including some more accustomed to lords than herself, was watching her with secret rage?

The feelings of the other young ladies were destined to a good deal of farther outrage that evening. In spite of her want of enthusiasm about races, Lord Fitz-John had come to the conclusion that Minna was far better fun than any other girl present—a conclusion in which his experience of the rest only confirmed him when, for form's sake, he was obliged to give some of them a turn. The consequence was that, as he was not a man to deny himself any pleasure within his reach, he was by Minna's side during the greater part of the evening, either dancing with her—and certainly he danced uncommonly well—or endeavoring to enlighten her ignorance on sporting subjects. Lady Fitz-John was furious (she felt quite friendly toward poor Arabella now), but Lady Fitz-John's wrath was powerless to arrest the flow of the flirtation. To the end of the evening her willful son persisted in devoting himself almost exclusively to Minna, and, when the end came, went out to help her with his own lordly hand into the carriage. Minna exulted exceedingly; the fumes of so much honor had got fairly into her head.

There was another person who exulted besides Minna. As soon as the carriage had driven off, Mrs. Fanshawe turned round, and embraced her adopted daughter rapturously.

"Dear, dear child—what a darling you are! I never saw any thing so marked in my life. Kiss me again, my sweet pet. You will always find a corner in your heart for poor mamma, won't you? I'll tell you what we will do—we'll give a ball directly, and ask him and his mother. She won't come very likely, but he will. Oh yes! he will, my darling, never fear. What do you think? is it not a good plan?"

"I dare say it is," said Minna, turning away her head to look out at the moonlit road. "It is a long time since we had a ball, and we owe invitations to a good many. You know best, mamma, of course."

And then she gave a deep sigh, which Mrs. Fanshawe did not hear in the excitement of calculating who was and who was not stylish enough to be invited on so momentous an occasion.

When Minna reached her own room that evening she forgot to ring for her maid, and sat for a long time dreamy and pensive at her toilet-table, so absorbed in reverie that she mechanically loosened her long braids of shining hair and let them fall flowing about her shoulders without once raising her eyes to the mirror to see the effect. Whether the meditations which engrossed her thus were more pleasing or displeasing in their nature it would have been difficult for the closest observer to conclude, for at one moment she smiled and at another sighed heavily. Probably she herself hardly knew the complexion of her thoughts until at last she was startled into self-consciousness by catching herself in the act of asking—

"Oh! why does he not make haste?"

No sound had passed her lips, the words having only been uttered mentally, but nevertheless she started violently, and a crimson blush suffused itself over her face and neck. For she knew that the thought thus obscurely expressed in the recesses of her heart would, if fully interpreted, have run thus—"Why does he not make haste to speak before I am carried off by another?" and she knew farther that the "he" stood to represent Raymond Lee.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT MINNA DID WITH THE BOUQUET.

BUT Raymond Lee, unfortunately not knowing what reason there was for making haste, and fearing above all things to mar a possible chance by over-precipitation, still deferred the decisive moment.

Day followed day, week followed week, and all that Minna knew certainly was that, whereas formerly he had never shown himself at places of fashionable resort, she now met him in public frequently, always by himself, and always apparently indifferent to what interested the crowd around him. She had her own theory as to what was the probable cause of so abrupt a change in his habits, and her own fancies about the expression of his eyes when they rested upon her; but all this was mere speculation, founded on very imperfect observation. For except in public she had no opportunity at this time of seeing him. Mrs. Fanshawe still abstained from asking Mr. Lee to spend another friendly evening with them; and Minna, though pondering much over the omission, had not yet found courage to make any suggestion on the subject. In the meantime it was something to her that he had received and accepted an invitation for the grand ball which Mrs. Fanshawe had lost no time in organizing, and at which Lord Fitz-John and his mother were expected to be present. To this festivity Minna looked forward with strangely conflicting feelings, hardly knowing whether she most desired or dreaded its approach.

Desired or dreaded, the momentous date drew near and nearer, and at last the day arrived preceding that fixed for the ball. In the forenoon of this day Minna received two very unexpected visits. Mrs. Fanshawe had gone out to give some final orders with reference to the entertainment of the following evening, while Miss Fanshawe remained at home busy with the fab-

rication of a contemptuous little note in the third person, which, short as it was, she had some trouble in making as contemptuous as she wished. Scarcely had this missive been sealed and handed to a servant to post, when Minna, just settling herself down to an hour's quiet embroidery, was disturbed by her maid entering the neat little boudoir to say—

"If you please, miss, there's a young person—a young lady down stairs who wants particularly to see you. John said he didn't know if you were at home."

"A young lady! Who is it?"

"She wouldn't give her name, miss. She said you would be sure to know who it was when you heard she wanted to see you. I was thinking," continued the woman respectfully, seeing that her mistress still looked perplexed, "that perhaps it is the same young lady you told us of who was to be shown straight into your room."

Minna gave a little start—she had evidently forgotten all about Amy's promised visit—but, recovering herself, said with a dignified iciness which lowered the maid's opinion of the unknown young person more than even the unfashionable cloak and dowdy bonnet in which she had come arrayed—

"Tell the young lady I am ready to see her."

And then she folded her hands with great stateliness, and majestically awaited the appearance of the visitor.

Surely something must have happened to alter Minna's feelings toward her sister very considerably since their last parting.

Amy was shown in, and the door was shut upon her, but even then Minna did not become much more cordial.

"How do you do? Pray sit down."

Amy did not seem surprised at the frigidity of her welcome, nor indeed to have expected any thing different. She sat down as she was told, and, after what appeared a painful pause, began:

"Joe was at our house last night, and told me that he had been writing to you."

"Oh indeed! Then he told you of a very unwarrantable liberty he had been taking. There has been nothing in our acquaintance—if acquaintance it can be called—which could justify him in attempting to lecture me on my duties, or for that matter in addressing me at all. I hope he will understand from my reply that I expect to be troubled no farther on the subject."

She spoke these words with an air which was, and was meant to be, as severely grand as possible, for she fancied that Amy had come to second Joe's appeal, and she was determined to let her see beforehand the futility of all attempts at aggression. But, somewhat to her embarrassment, Amy did not carry herself aggressively at all, and, clasping her little hands together, went on in tones of humble entreaty and deprecation which took Minna quite by surprise.

"I have come to say how very sorry I am that it should have happened. It was very foolish of Joe, and I have told him so, but I hope you will look it over—for my sake, you know. For indeed, indeed, it was not my fault. I had no idea he ever thought of doing such a thing till he told me last night, and I am sure neither had father."

"Oh! as for that, I never suspected my father of having any thing to do with it," replied Min-

na, with a touch of bitterness showing through her dignity. "After what has passed, it was impossible to suppose that he could be so extremely desirous to have me near him as Mr. Pullyn's lively imagination represented. It seems to me that Mr. Pullyn has taken a liberty with my father as well as myself," she added, relapsing into severity.

"It was a very great liberty," said Amy penitently. "But I am sure that I have made him see that he has done wrong, and you will look it over, won't you? And you will believe that I had nothing to do with it, please, for upon my word I had not—I never thought of asking any thing so unreasonable of you for a moment. Please look it over, dear Minnie; I can not bear that you should be offended with us."

Minna's heart was not made of stone, and the spectacle of shy little Amy's distress fairly melted it.

"Dear, dear Amy, don't say another word about it, and I promise you I'll never think of it again. I am only sorry I was in such a hurry to send away my answer to Mr. Pullyn's foolish letter, but it won't do him any harm, and next time you see him you can tell him to tear it up, as I will tear up what he wrote me, and all shall be as though nothing of the kind had happened."

But sometimes it is not so easy to annul the consequences of a rash act as Minna seemed to imagine.

"Kiss me, Amy, and we'll say no more about it. Now take off your bonnet, dear, and let us begin to enjoy ourselves. Nonsense, I won't have any excuses—you are going to spend the whole afternoon with me, and nothing less will serve. Do you hear me? take off your bonnet directly."

Her pretty imperiousness was quite irresistible, and Amy had nothing for it but to do as she was bid, looking, however, so shy and frightened that Minna thought it necessary to reassure her.

"Oh! there is nothing to be afraid of, I can promise you, unless it is me, and I am not so very formidable a person, I hope. Nobody will dare to intrude upon us here, and here we will stop all day, and have luncheon brought to us, and be very cosy and happy. In this room you are under my roof; it is my boudoir, and held specially sacred to me."

Amy looked reverentially round, for the first time taking note of the grandeur about her, which hitherto had only vaguely impressed her with a general sense of awe.

"Is it indeed? It is very beautiful."

And she thought with amazement of the condescension which her sister had shown in occupying that poor little bed-room at Black Moor Farm which was all she had been able to offer her.

"It is rather a pretty room, I think," said Minna complacently—"all fitted up according to my own taste, you know. And yonder is my bed-room leading out of it, and beyond that again my dressing-room. Would you like to come and look at them, dear? and then you will know all about me and my local habitation."

She thought she would be doing a very hospitable thing in entertaining her sister with an exhibition of her belongings, but in truth it was pleasant for herself to have some one to show

them to who was so fresh to splendor of all kinds as Amy.

"I should like it very much, please," said Amy timidly, following her sister into the next room. "Oh dear! how very fine every thing is!"

"There is my bed, you see, in that recess—a neat little concern, is it not? How do you like the color of the curtains? And there is my bookcase with all my pet books in it and my pet statuettes on the top."

"I never saw any thing half so beautiful," said Amy, looking round with unconcealed wonder and admiration.

Minna was not surprised at the remark, and yet could not help being pleased.

"I am glad you like my snugery, dear. I think it really is rather a nice one."

"It is indeed," fervently assented Amy, averting her eyes nervously from her own shabby little figure incongruously reflected in a gilt looking-glass. "And that is your dressing-table, I suppose—how handsome it is, and what beautiful scent-bottles these are! And oh! what a magnificent nosegay!"

"Very fine flowers, are they not? Lord Fitz-John cut them for me the other day," replied Minna with an assumed carelessness which was in reality (though she did not know it) the rank-est ostentation. For if she intended any thing by it, she intended Amy to conclude that receiving a bouquet from a lord was an every-day occurrence which she thought nothing of.

Ostentation notwithstanding, Minna's account of how she came by the flowers was strictly true. She and Mrs. Fanshawe, driving near Fitz-John Park the week before, had been met by his lordship, who had insisted that they should enter and see his mother. He remembered with some resentment that when they had called a few days previously to pay her their respects after the *fête*, she had chosen not to be at home; and he could not neglect so good an opportunity of circumventing and annoying her. As might have been expected, her reception of the visitors was not very gracious, and, as might also have been expected, her son was in consequence more demonstrative than ever in his attention to them, or at least to one of them. He talked to Minna perseveringly the whole time, and, when she admired some cut flowers ornamenting the table, would not be satisfied till she and Mrs. Fanshawe had accompanied him to the conservatory, where he stripped more than one of his mother's favorite plants to make the bouquet which Amy now admired. So that Minna might well feel a little proud of it and the lordly homage it represented.

On hearing so grand a name so familiarly pronounced, Amy appeared very properly impressed.

"Lord Fitz-John!" she repeated in tones of respectful surprise exceedingly agreeable to Minna. "You know Lord Fitz-John very well then?"

"Oh yes! we know him, of course," said Minna, still struggling to keep up her assumption of carelessness. "He and his mother are coming to our house to-morrow; we are going to have a ball."

"Indeed! I suppose it is to be very grand."

"Well, I don't know about that. Every thing will be very nice of course. Would you like to

see my new dress?"—the instinct of feminine nature was too strong for her here, and her manner became animated again. "It came home last night, and it does look so well. This way, dear, it is hanging up in the dressing-room."

Amy went into the dressing-room, and was struck dumb by the splendor of the fabric there displayed to her.

"It is a beauty, is it not?" asked Minna delightedly.

"It seems almost too good to wear," murmured Amy.

"Ah! but it was made to wear," rejoined Minna more philosophically.

"How very beautiful you will look in it!" said Amy thoughtfully, gazing first at the dress, and then at her sister, as though trying to realize the effect of a combination.

"You little flatterer! Well, perhaps I shan't be quite a fright. And then I am to have a beautiful head-dress of lilies and forget-me-nots—it has not come home yet, or I would let you see it. Blue and white are the colors that become me best, you know. Oh, yes! I think I shall look tolerably well."

"I am sure of it," said Amy earnestly.

"The drawing-rooms are to be festooned with blue and white on purpose," went on Minna, getting more and more communicative as she found how appreciative a listener she had to do with. "We have tried the effect this morning in the little drawing-room, and it looks so nice, you can't think. Suppose you come and take a peep; there is nobody down stairs just now; mamma—Aunt Fanshawe—isn't back yet, I know. Come, I really should like you to see, and then to-morrow night you will be able to picture every thing to yourself quite exactly."

"I should like it too," said Amy wistfully. "If only you are sure Aunt Fanshawe is not at home."

"Oh! I am quite sure, dear. Come along."

And, lightly tripping, she led the way down stairs.

"What a handsome stair-case!" commented Amy.

"Ah! is it? Yes, well enough," said Minna, almost surprised at the observation, for she had always taken the stair-case for granted. "It will look very different to-morrow night, you know, lighted and done up with evergreens. This way, dear; what we call the little drawing-room is on this side."

"It's like a palace!" exclaimed Amy with a long breath, as the vision of the little drawing-room—with chalked floor, and doorways hung with blue and white drapery, and flower-wreathed mirrors and chandeliers—burst upon her astonished view. "I never saw any thing like it in my life. What splendid looking-glasses, to be sure! And, oh dear! what tall windows!—I should think you were always afraid of an accident with so much glass."

"We should only have to get it mended again, you know," said Minna, feeling a little amused at her sister's delicious *naïveté*. "These windows open on the garden, you see; they are very convenient."

"So they are. What a beautiful garden you have got!"

"It is larger than you can see from here; it goes quite round the house. Will you step out

and look at it? we can go in again by the back way."

She threw the folding leaf of the window open as she spoke, and stepped on to the terrace of turf running outside.

But no sooner had she done this than she started violently, and came to an abrupt stop. The garden gate, left ajar by a careless servant, was being pushed open by a hand from without; and, quick as lightning, the idea of that little country girl and herself being caught together by visitors flashed across Minna's mind in all its horror. It was too late, however, to retreat now. Already the gate had been opened, and a tall figure appeared coming up the garden toward the house. And no sooner was Minna aware of the tall figure than she was aware also, almost without looking, that it was Raymond Lee's.

She was very much surprised, so much surprised that for a moment she nearly forgot the awkwardness of Amy's presence, and—no doubt from surprise too—found herself all at once strangely tremulous.

He seemed to discover her almost as instantaneously as she had recognized him, and, leaving the graveled way immediately, struck across the lawn toward the window of the little drawing-room. In another moment they had shaken hands.

"Pray step inside, Mr. Lee," said Minna nervously, when, hardly knowing how, she had got through the first formalities of greeting. "Mamma is out just now, but I do not think she will be long."

She turned back into the room. Amy had been standing close behind her, and was now observed for the first time by Raymond, who silently inclined his head to her as he entered. But even on this, Minna made no attempt to introduce her.

Minna was now in terrible embarrassment. She did not know what to do—not even whether to ask Raymond to sit down. If he sat down, she must sit down too; and it was manifestly out of the question that they should both be seated while Amy was standing. It might have seemed easy to offer Amy a chair also, but to Minna this solution of the difficulty was very undesirable. For Amy's sitting down would have destroyed any illusion that Raymond might peradventure entertain as to her being a young person sent by the upholsterer to assist in the decorations; and Minna did not wish such an illusion to be destroyed. It was very cowardly of her, and she knew it, and resolved that as soon as they were alone she would make Amy a handsome present out of her jewel-case. In the meanwhile, she did not give her poor little sister so much as a look, and Amy, feeling dreadfully confused, shrank behind her once more, and glanced anxiously toward the door.

"I must apologize for this intrusion, Miss Fanshawe," began Raymond, looking and feeling at least as much embarrassed as the other two. But I think I heard Mrs. Fanshawe say the other day that she would like to be at the launch of the *Ulysses*."

"I know mamma wanted to go," faltered Minna. "But papa was too late in applying, and there were no tickets left."

"I have just received a contractor's order," said Raymond eagerly (he did not add that it

had been sent him in answer to a very urgent application). And I have come to say that it is quite at your disposal—and Mrs. Fanshawe's. I am sorry the notice is so short, but it is not twelve yet, and if you are there by one o'clock you will be in time."

Minna's heart leaped high at the prospect of spending an afternoon in Raymond's company; for of course he would go if they went—would probably indeed escort them. But immediately afterward it sank again. How could she treat Amy with such rudeness as to leave her after making her promise to stay for the afternoon? And then, supposing this difficulty overcome, Mrs. Fanshawe was not at home, and Minna would have been afraid of taking on herself the responsibility of accepting Raymond's civility. She had an instinct that her mamma rather wanted to keep Mr. Lee at arm's length for the present.

"You are very good," she said in a low voice. "But—but—I am particularly engaged at home this afternoon."

She glanced uncomfortably round, hoping that Amy would not betray what the detaining cause was. But Amy was no longer in the room, having watched her opportunity to edge toward the door and slip out unobserved. For the first time in her life, Minna was alone with Mr. Lee, and the discovery did not diminish her embarrassment.

Without being told, Raymond appeared to understand that the stranger had something to do with the pleaded engagement, for he went on to argue—

"The order does not put any limit on numbers. Your friend—the young lady—can accompany you if you like."

Minna's opinion of Amy was considerably raised by the discovery that Raymond, less observant of unfashionable dress-making than the acute lady's maid, had taken her for a young lady after all. But still she had no choice except to refuse; in spite of Raymond's liberality of judgment, she would not have been seen in public with Amy for all the world.

"My friend is staying to luncheon with me"—she was not ashamed of mentioning this little fact since Amy had received Mr. Lee's endorsement. "And she would be too tired for sight-seeing, I am sure; she comes from a great distance."

Raymond looked disappointed—as in truth he was, more by the visible constraint of Minna's manner than by her refusal of the order.

"You will not be able to go then?"

"We shall not indeed. I am very sorry," she added quickly, fearing that she might have offended him.

But he was not offended, only disappointed and disheartened.

They both stood still a moment, rather sadly and very awkwardly (Minna's wonted *savoir-faire* had all evaporated to-day), and then Raymond said—

"I must not stay longer now; I am keeping you from your friend."

"Will you not wait to see mamma?" she asked tremulously.

"Not to-day. Good-bye, Miss Fanshawe."

"Good-bye. We shall see you to-morrow evening?"

He had just been thinking to himself that he

would never come again—the pain was greater than the pleasure—and was a little staggered by the question.

"Perhaps it would be better for me to make my excuses," he said after a pause. "The truth is, I had no right to accept Mrs. Fanshawe's invitation. I don't dance, and have no business at balls."

A sudden terror quivered through Minna's heart; Raymond was vexed with her, and was going to leave her forever.

"Oh! but you will come!" she cried hastily. And in her voice was a ring of supplication which she detected directly after the words were spoken, and the consciousness of which made her color come and go rapidly.

Raymond must have detected it too, for she felt his eyes on her face instantly.

"Do you care for my coming, then?" she heard him say in low earnest tones.

She could not speak; she was almost choked by the tumultuous beating of her heart, and her color came and went more rapidly than ever.

As for Raymond, a hope had seized him which seemed to make his blood turn to fire within his veins. The moment he had so long looked for, so often well-nigh despaired of, had surely come.

He took her hand, and she made no attempt to withdraw it.

But just as he was about to speak the words which rose straight from his heart to his lips, the sound of wheels was heard without; and, looking round, Raymond and Minna both saw through the open window Mrs. Fanshawe's carriage, with Mrs. Fanshawe in it, rolling up the drive. Mrs. Fanshawe saw them too, and, though looking decidedly surprised at first, recovered herself sufficiently to smile and nod graciously.

Minna's mother though he deemed her, Raymond had never succeeded in liking Mrs. Fanshawe, and her advent at this moment jarred upon him as something antipathetic and discordant. He let Minna's hand go, and the passionate words that had been hovering on his lips resolved themselves into a tame

"Good-bye, Miss Fanshawe."

But Minna knew very well that when he had taken her hand he had meant more than only to say good-bye. And, knowing this, she wished with all her heart that something had occurred to detain her mamma a few minutes longer.

Mrs. Fanshawe entered the room immediately afterward, for she was not willing that so dangerous a *tête-à-tête* should be prolonged. She was a good deal relieved to find Raymond on the point of leaving, and still more so when he explained that he had called with an order for viewing the launch, of which he understood that an engagement would prevent Mrs. and Miss Fanshawe from availing themselves. On discovering that Minna had been so prudent, Mrs. Fanshawe felt that she could afford to be cordial, and thanked Raymond very warmly for his courtesy.

"So very kind of you, Mr. Lee—really so excessively kind. I am particularly sorry that—a—hem—a prior engagement . . . What! are you really going so soon? that is too bad. Well, to-morrow we shall have the pleasure of seeing you again?"

This time Raymond made no objection on the score of not dancing.

"I shall certainly come," was his answer, and Minna noted it with internal satisfaction.

When Raymond was gone, Mrs. Fanshawe praised Minna for her discretion.

"You were quite right to say we were engaged, my love. We have a great many things to do just now, it would have been very inconvenient to give up so much time."

"But I really was engaged, mamma," said Minna.

The theory that she had made a false excuse to Raymond was singularly distasteful to her. And then she explained how Amy had come to see her and was at that moment in the house.

Mrs. Fanshawe received the news rather ungraciously, but did not oppose Minna's entertaining her sister for that afternoon if she chose, and Minna accordingly went up stairs to rejoin her guest, whom she found demurely sitting in the bed-room contemplating the bouquet on the toilet-table.

"I owe you a great many apologies, Amy dear. I hope you have not been very dull sitting all this time by yourself."

"Oh no! thank you; I have had so many pretty things to look at, you know. Can you tell me the name of this beautiful flower? I have been admiring it so very much."

Minna took up the bouquet carelessly.

"Really I can't, dear. I'm not a bit of a botanist. But here it is for you if you like."

And, thus speaking, she drew forth the flower to which her sister had called attention—the largest and finest of the bunch.

"Oh, Minnie! to spoil your beautiful nosegay like that! I am so sorry!" said Amy remorsefully.

"Sorry! what are you sorry for? Why, you don't think I mind about spoiling it, do you? The great stupid thing; it is a week old nearly—not fit to be kept a day longer. Pah! it is getting quite unpleasant!"

And with these words Lord Fitz-John's bouquet was tossed contemptuously out of the window. Yet only that morning Minna had trimmed the stalks carefully and changed the water with her own hands.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE FOR RAYMOND.

RAYMOND left Minna's presence that day in a kind of waking trance.

He seemed to be living and moving in an enchanted atmosphere of his own, through which nothing was visible save Minna's bright face mantling with conscious blushes, and nothing audible save Minna's persuasive voice saying, "Oh! but you will come." He was so happy that he could scarcely believe in his own happiness, and yet his recollections of that face and that voice assured him that it was real. And with this assurance came a feverish longing to see her again, to speak the words he had been going to speak when he took her hand, and to hear from her lips the answer. He determined that at the ball of the next evening he would seek her and tell her plainly of his love; and to the ball he looked forward with a wild impatience strangely at variance with what those best acquainted with him knew of his character. But

when a first passion takes hold of a man of mature age who has dissipated none of the energy of his heart on hobbled-hoy attachments, it is apt to possess itself of him with dangerously accumulated force; and, until he had been dazzled by Minna's apparition in his dingy office-parlor, Raymond Lee had never been in love, or fancied himself in love, in his life.

He was obliged to rouse himself somewhat out of his dream of ecstasy as the day wore on, having to perform the duties of a host to his friend Joe Pullyn, who had been asked to dine with him that evening. But when the hour of meeting came, it was soon apparent that he might have been as absent and inattentive as he pleased without being found out, for Joe himself was evidently not in the humor to be observant. In spite of his own preoccupation, Raymond could not help noticing that the poor fellow was woefully out of spirits. The peculiar gloss which usually distinguished him when he was dressed was conspicuously wanting to-day; a general damp was upon him both mentally and externally, and he was altogether silent, flabby, and wretched, as a dispirited bird that has lost its song and all proper pride in its plumage. Raymond felt very sorry for him—the more sorry as he himself was so wondrously glad and jubilant—and, as soon as they found themselves alone after dinner, sounded him gently, in the hope of finding the cause of his dejection removable.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Joe? You don't seem quite yourself to-day."

This simple expression of sympathy had the effect of bringing out Joe at once. He expanded to Raymond's kindness as a budding sun-flower to the sun, only that the sun-flower looks a great deal more cheerful than Joe did when he answered—

"I'm not myself, Mr. Lee, and that's the truth of it. Quite the contrary; if it isn't wicked to say so (for I don't want to be ungrateful for my blessings), I'm the most miserable fellow breathing."

Joe put his elbow on the table, and rested his cheek moodily on one hand, while he plaited the table-cloth into minute wrinkles with the other.

"I am sorry to hear you say that. What's the matter?"

"Do you remember what we were speaking about last time I dined here? That's what the matter is, Mr. Lee. I've been and regularly put my foot in it, and all for no good—there's the worst of all. I must go away, and Amy must stop behind, and very likely we shall both be dead before I come back again. And then we should never be married, you know."

"Come, come, Joe, you must try to look at things in a more cheerful light than that."

But Joe only shook his head dolefully.

"It isn't likely a man can be very cheerful when he's made such a mess of things as I've been doing. I've been writing to Amy's sister that I told you of—you seemed to think I ought to—and it isn't to be believed what trouble it has got me into, and all for nothing. Amy is angry with me—I never saw Amy so put out before; and Amy's sister is angry with me—if you were only to see the letter she has written back to me. I don't mind letting you look at it if you like, Mr. Lee, and then you'll know it can't have been over-pleasant for a fellow's feelings."

"The name is a secret, but I know you're to be trusted. Here it is, I think."

He fumbled in his pocket till he had produced a tiny note done up in a pink envelope, which he pushed across the table to Raymond.

"She needn't have been quite so haughty with me—upon my word I think she needn't. For I did try so hard to put it to her gently and delicately and respectfully—that I did; and as I say, it was doing a kindness to her as well as to me and Amy to let her know how her poor old father was fretting after her."

Raymond did not answer; his eyes were intently riveted on the bit of note-paper which by this time he held open before him. His hand did not shake, and his face was as gravely composed as usual; but it might have been seen by an attentive observer that his lips were very pale.

This was what Amy's sister wrote:—

"LAUREL HOUSE, GROVE ROAD,

"Tuesday.

"Miss Fanshawe presents her compliments to Mr. Joseph Pullyn, and begs to inform him that she has received the letter which he has thought fit to address to her. Perhaps when he knows this, and learns besides that these lines are the only notice which she intends to take of it, Mr. Pullyn will refrain from troubling Miss Fanshawe with farther communications. It may be right to add, with a view of saving time which in Mr. Pullyn's position ought to be valuable, that all such farther communications will be returned unopened."

If Minna had only foreseen, when she had taken so much pains to make this missive freezing and contemptuous, what was to be its effect! To Raymond it was as a thunderbolt falling at his feet. He would have taken refuge in unbelief if he could; would have tried to persuade himself that the Miss Fanshawe who, as it seemed, was Amy's sister—the girl who preferred fineladyism to her old father, and who could be so cold and hard and disdainful—was not his Miss Fanshawe, but another. He knew, however, that there was only one Miss Fanshawe in the house whence this frigid little document was dated, and was compelled to understand that there could be no mistake.

"Isn't that being hard on a fellow?" said Joe, whose feelings were evidently quite as much hurt as the writer of the letter could have desired. "It was quite bad enough to have vexed Amy so, without having a letter like that shied at one's face like a dab of wet sponge. And Amy was vexed, to be sure. You see she's fond of this grand girl somehow—I couldn't be, I know, but Amy's an angel—and she was afraid what I'd done would give offense. She talked of coming over to St. Austin's this morning on purpose to call on her and explain. Poor little pet—if she did, I'll be bound she got black looks enough to frighten her out of her wits, and all through my confounded meddling. A pretty kettle of fish I've made of it indeed!"

Through the tumult of his thoughts Raymond heard these words vaguely and confusedly, much as an uneasy sleeper may hear conversation going on in the same room with him. But as the dreams of sleepers may, unconsciously to themselves, be influenced by words spoken in their hearing, so Raymond now, scarcely knowing

whence he derived the materials of the inference, came to the unhesitating conclusion that it was Minna's sister whom he had seen that morning with Minna when he called. He had forgotten all about the unknown damsel from that time to this, but he remembered now that she was a neat pleasant-looking little creature, with a candid face, and a quiet modest bearing which would never have suggested her to him as being other than a lady. And yet Minna had evidently been ashamed of her. The omission of all ceremony of introduction, of all attempt to include the shy stranger in conversation, had not struck him at the time; but he recollected it now, and the recollection brought conviction with it. Minna had been ashamed of her sister. This was the secret of the unusual constraint of manner which had so perplexed and disappointed him.

The shock of finding the image of Minna—hitherto his ideal of perfection—associated with conduct which his conscience censured as weak and unworthy, was very terrible to him. Yet, in spite of his natural tendency toward severity, he felt wonderfully little angry with her. He was grieved and startled rather than sternly condemnatory. He could not even get up a show of indignation for the purpose of pleasing Joe, who had looked forward to the consolation of hearing Miss Fanshawe's note criticised mercilessly, and who was as much disappointed as surprised when Mr. Lee only handed it back, saying mildly—

"You must not let your mind dwell on this too much, Joe. Better tear it up and try to forget it."

Thus discouraged, poor Joe did not dilate farther on his grievances that evening, to Raymond's infinite relief. In course of time it came somehow or other to an end, and Raymond was left alone to meditate on the revelation which had made such havoc in his modes of thinking and feeling.

So Minna was not the daughter of the artificial-looking artificial-feeling woman of the world whom he disliked, of the ponderous one-idea'd man of business whom he despised; she was not of, but only accidentally cast among, the frivolous pleasure-seekers and small-talk-mongers in the midst of whom he had gone with aversion and shrinking in quest of her. If only the discovery had ended there! But unfortunately, while he had learned that which made Minna externally all that he would have her, he had simultaneously learned that of her character which made her what he would not have had her for all the world. Her origin was what he would have chosen that it should be, but on the other hand, she was herself ashamed of it. For the first time he was compelled to think of her as of a being with faults. And yet—so far was he from feeling the righteous indignation which might have been expected—what affected him most in the knowledge of her faults was not the reprobation with which they made him regard her, but fear of how they might make her regard him. She was ashamed of the poor old father who was pining after her, ashamed of the nice gentle little sister who loved her. . . . Good Heavens! what could she think of a son of Walter Lee's?

CHAPTER XXV.

MINNA'S TRIUMPH.

THE hours sped on, and brought with them in due course the momentous evening of the ball. All the preparations had been successfully—nay, triumphantly—completed. The ball-room and reception-rooms had received the final touch of decoration, and were absolutely dazzling in their combination of light and color; and, more important still, Minna had emerged from the hands of her maid looking, as Mrs. Fanshawe did not scruple to declare, perfectly lovely. But proud as Mrs. Fanshawe was of the splendor of her rooms and the beauty of her adopted daughter, she did not feel entirely happy for some little time after her guests had begun to assemble. The ball had been got up in order that Lord Fitz-John might be present at it, and until he actually appeared she could not be certain that it was not to turn out a dead failure.

A failure, however, the ball was not to be. A little later than the majority of the company, as befitted his exalted station, Lord Fitz-John arrived, and not only Lord Fitz-John, but the Dowager Lady Fitz-John also—an honor which, after the chilling reception bestowed on herself and Minna the other day, Mrs. Fanshawe had hardly dared to count upon. And in truth it would not have been conferred only that Lady Fitz-John, like other mothers more anxious than prudent, had a notion that her presence might tend to keep her son out of mischief. So she had come, looking indeed very grim and stately, and wearing altogether an air of dignified martyrdom most unflattering to a hostess, but there she actually was in the flesh, representing a great incontrovertible fact to be chronicled on the morrow by all the local reporters and commented upon by all the local hangers-on of fashion. Mrs. Fanshawe was overjoyed.

But Mrs. Fanshawe's contentment was not yet shared by Minna. Even when Lord Fitz-John asked her hand for the first dance, and stood at the top of the room with her waiting for the music to strike up, though there is no denying that she was very much pleased, she was still far from being satisfied. The guest who was to be her guest of the evening, the guest who had been in her mind while she was dressing—the grand criterion—had not yet arrived, and even the twofold glory of Lord Fitz-John and his mother did not fill up the blank. She knew he would come—he had promised to come—but why was he so late? Her eyes wandered restlessly hither and thither among the company, more particularly seeking the doorway, and so distracted was she from her proper business that she failed to catch her partner's opening remark to the effect that it was a warm evening, and all but made a mistake in the first figure.

The quadrille was about half over when a sudden bound at her heart warned her that the person she had expected was entering the room.

She was in the midst of an important evolution at the time, and was obliged to withdraw her eyes before his had found her. Nevertheless she observed, by a series of stealthy side-glances, that he made his way round by the wall to a little table standing by itself in a remote corner, where he took his place apart from all others, and was soon apparently absorbed in a volume

of prints. Minna was now, like Mrs. Fanshawe, wholly satisfied, and for the first time that evening began thoroughly to enjoy herself. Even Lord Fitz-John benefited by an arrival which might have been deemed prejudicial to his interests, for now that all doubt about Raymond's coming was at an end, she was able to give her partner a much larger share of her attention than before. She had only one subject of preoccupation left—did Raymond know that it was Lord Fitz-John whom she was dancing with? But never mind—if he did not know the important fact already, he would be sure to find it out. She became all at once lively and smiling, and *piquante* in her replies, so that, before the dance was over, Lord Fitz-John had internally pronounced her a regular fascinating little devil beside whom the other girls in the room were absolutely nowhere.

"You will enter me to dance the first waltz with you, won't you?" he asked, when the quadrille was over and they were promenading the room together.

"Let me see, that comes next, I think," she answered, referring to a little programme she carried in her sash. "I should be most happy, I am sure, but unfortunately I have promised the first waltz to Captain Lennox. He asked me an hour ago nearly, and of course I could not refuse."

She would have considered it horribly undignified to vouchsafe to an ordinary cavalier so elaborate an apology for not dancing with him. But the cavalier in the present case was a lord, and so was not ordinary at all.

"Ah! that's a pity. I like waltzing with you; you do it so well. But I suppose it's my own fault for not being here sooner to book you myself. Not that it was my fault either; my mother was so confoundedly long in dressing. It's my belief she wouldn't have been ready now if I had not sent up word to say that if she didn't come at once I would go without her. I knew that would frighten her—ha! ha! ha!"

The joke seemed to tickle his lordship's fancy amazingly, but, not knowing enough of the circumstances to see the point of it, Minna did not respond except by a faint smile. A very faint smile, and rather absent-looking too, for at the moment she was engaged in wondering why Raymond Loe, whom she had just passed so close that her dress almost touched him, had let her go by without once raising his eyes from the engraving he was poring over. He had been in a brown study, no doubt, but then there are some occasions on which people have no business to be in brown studies.

"Well, Miss Fanshawe," went on his lordship, intent on getting as much amusement as possible out of his evening, "you have entered Captain Lennox for the next, but you will enter me for the next again, I hope. Come, you can't refuse that?"

"For the Lancers, you mean? Oh! certainly, with a great deal of pleasure. I am so fond of the Lancers."

"And before any body else gets hold of you, you'll promise to let me take you in to supper, eh? It spoils five per cent. of the pleasure of supper to get stuck beside some scraggy old girl you are wishing all the time at the bottom of the sea."

If she had thought about it, she might have

had a notion that a man would not talk in this fashion to a lady whom he regarded quite as his own equal; but though she would have resented so liberal a use of slang in any other partner, she did not resent it in this one.

"Oh, Lord Fitz-John! Well, in that case I suppose I must promise—any thing rather than let you form so uncharitable a wish as that."

She laughed, and looked, as she felt, very much elated. And yet all the time she was a little disappointed too. She had been thinking that Raymond, who had told her that he never danced, would probably make a point of taking her in to supper.

"Very well, that is settled then. Will you sit down here?"

The place thus chosen for her was in full view of Raymond Lee's corner, and she felt grateful to the chooser as she took it. Raymond could not fail to see her now—could not fail to come over and speak to her. He need not to be afraid of interrupting Lord Fitz-John, for Lord Fitz-John, though still standing near her, seemed to have exhausted his conversational resources for the present, and was wholly occupied with caressing his mustache and looking about him.

But still Raymond made no sign; never even, so far as she could see, turning his head toward where she sat. She felt very much surprised and disappointed. It was doubtless because he thought she was engaged in conversation with Lord Fitz-John, though surely this was carrying deference to a most absurd extent. She was very proud of having the young nobleman so long at her side, and yet now she began to wish that he would go away.

He did go away presently, being carried off by Mrs. Fanshawe to be introduced to a very plain young lady with whom that sagacious matron judged that he might be safely trusted; and Minna's heart beat high with expectation. Now Raymond would certainly come to her, as certainly as she was sitting there, virtually alone, waiting for him.

No, Raymond did not come. One minute passed, and then another, and he was still turning and re-turning the leaves of that stupid book. What in the world did he mean by it? Was it possible he did not see her?—but that seemed out of the question. Or could it be that he was offended with her for receiving so much of Lord Fitz-John's homage? In that case what a tyrannical, unreasonable creature he must be! The very idea made Minna feel quite hot. While she was still speculating, the music of the waltz struck up, and a young military dandy, who was Captain Lennox, approached to claim his partner. Minna rose and let herself be whirled off by him smiling, and to all appearance in a state of high contentment, but with a pang at her heart, half of indignation, half of perplexity, that made each smile an effort. If Mr. Lee would not speak to her, why had he come at all?

Why had he come at all? This was the very question which Raymond was asking of himself at the same moment.

He had not raised his head from his book since first he had taken up his station, but he had been secretly watching her all the time notwithstanding. He had never seen her dance before, and the sight caused the idea of winning

her for himself to appear more incongruously extravagant than ever. To see her fluttering about the room in her light gauzy drapery—a butterfly in its native element—made him feel himself the most miserably self-blinded and self-deceived of mortals for imagining that their lives could ever be in common. She looked so happy, so radiant, so thoroughly at home surrounded by all that glittering garishness which he detested—in the midst of which he felt, and felt that he must appear to her, absurdly and irreconcilably out of place. And then he knew now that her pleasure in these scenes, and among these people so utterly repugnant to him, ~~was~~ as genuine as it seemed to be. She had chosen her way of life willingly and deliberately, in opposition to the manifest claims of duty and natural affection, in preference to the love of a father and a sister. How was it possible that the girl who was dancing yonder, in a cloud of lace, and blonde, and sweet perfumes, when she ought to have been helping her sister to mend her father's stockings in the farm-house kitchen—how was it possible that she could ever listen to the love of one so grave and homely and plain-speaking as himself, unless indeed to extract from it a moment's passing amusement? She was as far divided from him as the moon from the child who cries for it—as far divided from him as she was from the father and sister whom she despised. Fool that he had been ever to think of her—double-dyed fool to let the recollection of her siren invitation bring him to the ball that night to swell her triumph, in defiance of his better judgment, which, after what he had learned yesterday, warned him to avoid her. So angry was he with himself that, for the first time since he had known her, he felt angry with Minna too.

Captain Lennox was a good dancer, and Minna enjoyed her waltz very much—would have enjoyed it, that is, if, whenever it brought her near Raymond, she had not seen him still sitting with downward-turned face and steadily averted eyes. Each time she passed him she found him always the same, and each time she grew more wondering and perplexed. At length, when the dance had already lasted several minutes, her suspense became too much for her, and she suddenly took a bold resolution which she put into execution the very next time she found herself approaching Raymond.

"Oh! if you please, Captain Lennox, I am afraid I am getting giddy."

The gallant captain's practiced arm brought her up directly.

"Giddy! you don't mean that. Will you sit down?"

"I think I must, if you please. How very stupid of me! Oh! Mr. Lee, I am taking your seat, am I not? very kind of you, really. Oh! it is nothing, thank you—it is only that I am a little giddy and out of breath;" and indeed this was true now. "And how long have you been here, Mr. Lee?"

Hypocritical Minna!

"Oh! I don't know. Not half an hour yet, I suppose. Time always drags with me in a place like this."

The speech was not polite, but Raymond was not in a polite humor.

"You have not been dancing yet then?"

me in this manner! You must join in that delightful waltz again, really. I wish I could too, for you know how fond I am of it, but I must not venture again this time. Suppose you go and ask Miss Wilson? She has not danced yet, I think; it will be quite a charity."

The captain could not resist such an appeal, and went off to perform his mission, looking, however, not very well pleased with it. But Miss Wilson was not destined to profit by Minna's benevolent consideration, for before the captain could reach her there was a general lull among the dancers, of which the musicians took advantage to play the concluding chords of the finale. The waltz was ended, and was no more to be resuscitated—the company dispersing themselves over the room at the discretion of the gentlemen, some of whom, preferring to retain their partners, promenaded it in the discussion of soft nothings, while others, desirous of emancipation for themselves, were politely anxious to find seats for the ladies.

Among the latter was Lord Fitz-John, who, having with the least possible delay disembarassed himself of the ineligible young lady with whom Mrs. Fanshawe had so discreetly provided him, hastened to claim Minna's promise for the next dance.

"You have not forgot you are booked to me for the Lancers, I hope, Miss Fanshawe," he said, coming up to the little table where she sat with Raymond standing by her side. "Suppose we make sure of our places now?"

Minna found the suggestion singularly inopportune. Why, she had only just succeeded in settling herself beside Mr. Lee, when here she was asked to break off the conversation ere it was well begun. She hesitated a moment, and then answered—

"Oh, Lord Fitz-John (the name pronounced very audibly), I am extremely sorry, but I must beg you to excuse me this time. That waltz has quite knocked me up; I must really rest a little before dancing again."

"Oh, indeed! that's awkward," said his lordship, turning on his heel instantly with a suppressed whistle. This was the first time that a young lady had ever pleaded fatigue as an excuse for not dancing with him, and he did not find the sensation agreeable. "Confound the girl, what does she mean by it?" he thought as he walked off. "It looks almost as if she was in love with that fellow there, that she won't leave him. Damned impertinent little hussy, she don't get hold of me again in a hurry."

If Raymond Lee could only have looked into Lord Fitz-John's mind just then, and seen what construction Minna's conduct was capable of bearing! But so ungratefully dull was he of comprehension, that it never occurred to him to think that she had made a sacrifice in sending away that heavy-eyed, thick-lipped young man.

Minna hardly realized the extent of the sacrifice herself, so pleased she was to have secured an interval for undisturbed conversation with Mr. Lee.

"I wonder you don't dance," she resumed, turning toward him again. "It is so delightful."

Another proof of the frivolity and love of pleasure which opposed an insurmountable barrier to his hopes!

"Is it? My taste is not so good—or so bad—as to find it so."

"Perhaps that's because you don't try, Mr. Lee."

If he had asked her to dance with him at that moment, she would probably have stood up with him in sheer forgetfulness of what Lord Fitz-John would think.

"It is true that I don't try. I detest it too much for that."

"Detest it! Oh dear! what strong language! Then I am afraid a dancing-party must be a terrible affliction to you."

Her petulance was beginning to array itself in arms against his sternness. But then she was only fencing in fun, and he was parrying in earnest.

"You are quite right. I hate parties, and ought to have nothing to do with them."

"And I love them," she answered, shaking her head willfully. "And as for dancing, why I positively adore it."

Poor Minna! she thought they had got up such a pretty little quarrel!

He looked at her bitterly for a few seconds. What a fool he had been, to be sure!

"Well, Miss Fanshawe, I will leave you in possession of the field," he said, with an effort at carelessness. "It is time for me to be going now."

"Going!" repeated Minna, hardly believing her ears. "Why, we shall not have supper for an hour and more."

"Ah! but you see I keep early hours, Miss Fanshawe. By the time you are at supper I shall probably be asleep. (Asleep! what a mockery!) Good evening; you must really excuse me."

"Oh! of course we would not detain you for the world. Good-evening, Mr. Lee."

They shook hands coldly, and in a moment more Raymond was making his way round the dancers toward the door. Minna looked after him as he went, and felt almost as if she hated him. Almost—not quite; or surely she would not have found such difficulty as she did in forcing back the tears which were ready to spring to her eyes.

"I wonder what he would say if he knew I might be Lady Fitz-John," she thought to herself indignantly. "Yes, indeed, Lady Fitz-John—for I believe I could be if I liked."

At that instant a couple came whirling past her in the final galop. Minna happened to raise her eyes toward them, and to her astonishment recognized—Lord Fitz-John and Arabella Vesey! So Lord Fitz-John had got hold of that girl Vesey again! How pleased she would be! And Minna felt decidedly the reverse of pleased.

The dance came to an end immediately afterward; and Minna, keeping watch from her solitary corner, saw with increasing chagrin Lord Fitz-John draw his partner's arm through his own and begin to perambulate the room with her, apparently engrossed in earnest and even confidential conversation. They came near Minna presently, and she could not help fancying that Arabella glanced at her with furtive triumph. As for Lord Fitz-John, he certainly did not look at her at all.

Minna felt very angry, and the object of her

anger was not Lord Fitz-John, but Raymond Lee.

"Yes, Lord Fitz-John is offended with me, that is plain enough. And it is all his fault, *his*—the mean-spirited wretch that I was. I wonder what I meant by it, that I do. But it's over now; he's gone, and I don't suppose I shall so much as see him again, and I'm sure I don't care. How odiously pleased that girl Arabella looks! *She* would not throw away the chance of being Lady Fitz-John, I'll be bound. Perhaps she won't get it, though. We'll see."

But the more Minna looked, the more apprehensive she became that perhaps Arabella would get it. If there was one art more than another in which Lord Fitz-John excelled, it was the art of "serving out" those who had offended or thwarted him. He had a fine instinct which taught him with almost unerring precision where people were most vulnerable, and what mode of treatment they would feel to be most annoying. So for another hour he devoted himself pretty exclusively to Arabella, with whom Minna had the mortification to see him dancing or talking nearly every time she looked toward him. And that it was a mortification for Minna is not to be denied. It was not only the fact of being slighted by Lord Fitz-John which grieved her; it was also the fact that what she regarded as her defeat and Arabella's triumph was witnessed by a whole room full of people. Every body was remarking that Miss Vesey seemed to have made a conquest—a "catch," as one of Minna's partners observed to her—and the consequence was that Minna felt herself publicly humiliated. She almost forgot Mr. Lee and his unpardonable rudeness in speculations whether Lord Fitz-John would speak to her again that evening. Surely it would be absolutely uncivil of him if he neglected to claim her promise of letting him take her in to supper.

And, as it proved, Lord Fitz-John did not carry his rancor to this length. When the hour of supper arrived, he seemed to have decided that it might be time to forgive, if not to forget, and once more sought out Minna.

"You are not too tired for supper, I hope, Miss Fanshawe?"

In this manner did his lordship extend the olive-branch. Minna might not have accepted it, proffered thus ungraciously, from a less august hand, but Lord Fitz-John being Lord Fitz-John, she caught at it at once—eagerly and even gratefully. Her self-love had that evening been sorely wounded, and the offer of a lordly arm was as precious balm applied to it. She felt reinstated in the opinion of others and in her own, and allowed herself to be forgiven very meekly.

She was on her best behavior during supper, making it a point to listen to all Lord Fitz-John's remarks, and see all Lord Fitz-John's jokes, to the exclusion of every body else. In a word, she made herself as agreeable to him as possible, and Minna could make herself very agreeable when she chose. Her good conduct was not without its recompense. Gradually she was taken back into favor, and before they had left table she had actually made such progress as to be engaged to her noble cavalier for the first dance after supper. When matters had reached this point, she glanced toward Arabella Vesey with a thrill of exultation. She only wished that Mr. Lee had been there too.

In due course supper was finished, and in due course also the first after-supper quadrille was organized. This time Minna did not plead fatigue when Lord Fitz-John reminded her of her engagement, but accepted his arm with becoming alacrity. The pride of her triumph made her appear very beautiful as she took her place by his side, and the young man, who moreover had drunk pretty freely of the excellent champagne plentifully supplied by Mrs. Fanshawe, looked at her with more admiration than ever he had felt yet—admiration which showed itself perhaps a little too boldly and familiarly in his glances, but she did not mind that. There was the kind of girl for him to stake his money on, he inwardly affirmed—cleaned-limbed, fine action, plenty of go in her—worth fifty of the broomsticks in petticoats his mother wanted to cram down his throat.

"You're not tired now, at all events, Miss Fanshawe," he began, when their share of the first figure was over. "By Jove, I never saw any one looking fresher in my life."

"Oh no! I am not tired now. This delightful quadrille—I am enjoying it so much."

"Are you? That's lucky; I was afraid I might be spoiling it for you."

"You! Oh, Lord Fitz-John, what do you mean?"

"Why, by dancing with you, to be sure. I thought a little while ago you had had enough of my dancing."

Minna laughed awkwardly at the reproach, thinking angrily the while of the renegade for whose sake she had incurred it.

"What an idea! You must consider me very unappreciative. And you such a good dancer!"

"I thought perhaps you didn't care for good dancers."

"It would be strange if I did not like good dancers when I am so fond of dancing. And I am so fond of dancing—oh! I can't tell you how passionately fond I am of it."

She spoke with an extraordinary emphasis which was not artificial, for she was thinking how Raymond Lee had said he hated it.

His lordship smiled, and pulled his mustache complacently.

"You are passionately fond of good dancers too, then?"

Minna blushed, but was relieved from the necessity of answering by finding herself called on to perform in the second figure.

"Little devil! I declare I believe she is fond of me," thought her partner, pulling at his mustache again.

Meanwhile, this renewal of friendly relations between Miss Fanshawe and Lord Fitz-John had been observed with a great deal of interest (pleasurable only in the case of Mrs. Fanshawe) by some three or four anxious female spectators. Among these was Lady Fitz-John, who watched every look and movement of the pair with lynx-eyed jealousy. The significance of Minna's last blush had not been lost on her, and she absolutely trembled as she noted it. She had been sitting at the side of the room opposite to that at which her son stood with his partner, but now she crossed over on the pretext of examining some pictures on the wall behind them.

When they had got through the second figure Lord Fitz-John renewed the conversation.

"Talking of good dancers, I'll give you the name of one if you like. That Miss Vesey I've been dancing with this evening—she's a first-rater."

He wanted to see how Miss Fanshawe would look under the influence of jealousy.

"Is she indeed? You see, ladies not being allowed to dance together, I have had no opportunity of forming an opinion."

"Oh! but she is, though, I can tell you. A deuced fine girl altogether—Miss Vesey—don't you think so?"

"I dare say. But I am so little of a judge."

The third figure began now. In the course of it Minna had to go forward to make a courtesy to her *vis-à-vis*, and at that moment Lord Fitz-John heard a well-known voice whisper sternly in his ear—

"Albert, your conduct is disgraceful."

He frowned, and Lady Fitz-John, seeing nothing of the frown and only feeling that she had discharged a sacred duty, resumed her contemplation of the pictures, and presently took the opportunity of returning to her seat, highly satisfied with her performance.

Poor woman! what a very bad manager she was!

The next time that there was an interval of repose, Lord Fitz-John said—

"Yes, she is a fine girl—uncommon. And yet do you know there's some one else in the room a great deal more after my fancy than she is."

"Indeed!" said Minna, pulling her fan open, and then shutting it again.

"A fact, upon my honor. And I think you know something of her, Miss Fanshawe."

Minna's heart had never yet quickened its beat at any thing Lord Fitz-John had said to her, but it did now; not, however, so much with pleasure as with sudden alarm. For it seemed to her that things were coming to a crisis, and she did not want to confront a crisis just then.

"Do I really?" she answered, attempting a light laugh. "That is very mysterious."

She felt that this was like inviting him to be explicit, and was angry with herself. And yet she had not known what else to say. Oh! if only he would change the conversation—if only he would give her till to-morrow!

"Is it? I hate mysteries. Shall I speak plainer, then?"

"Oh! Lord Fitz-John!" she murmured, opening and shutting her fan again. She was getting horribly nervous. What should she say to him if he went farther? She did not want to say yes—not just then at least—and yet, he being a lord, how could she say no?

She was looking very beautiful in her trepidation, and her partner fixed his eyes on her with great approbation, then raised them and glanced toward his mother. The infatuated woman was staring at him with all her might.

He looked at Minna again, and whispered—

"Do you know I think the girl I mean might be Lady Fitz-John if she chose?"

It had come then! Her heart gave a great leap, and then seemed to cease beating altogether.

"Does she choose?" persisted Lord Fitz-John, bending over her to catch her answer. "It is all as you like, you know. Does she choose? Or come, do you choose?—that's fairer."

"You are forgetting us, Miss Fanshawe," good-humoredly remonstrated one of her *vis-à-vis*.

She was wanted again in the dance, and went forward eagerly, thankful for the interruption. It gave her at least a moment for reflection. What should she do? Ask Lord Fitz-John for time? but that would be tantamount to a confession that she did not care for him, would give him an opportunity of retracting his offer altogether. And why should she want time? she knew very well that she would not say no. Say no to a man who was ready to make her a peeress! how could she? After Mr. Lee had treated her so shamefully—had indeed downright insulted her! But he would see she had some spirit left. And yonder was that odious Mrs. Vesey sitting watching her with her horrid green-gray eyes, for all the world like a spiteful cat! What would the woman say if she knew it was the future Lady Fitz-John she was looking at?

"Do you choose then?" repeated Lord Fitz-John when they had returned to their places.

"You must speak to papa and mamma about that," she answered, holding down her head.

"That means yes, I suppose? Come, it isn't fair to keep a fellow on the tenter-hooks like that."

"I suppose it does," she brought out faintly.

She was singularly moved as the words passed her lips, but could not have said whether it was with triumph or regret.

"Very well, then it's settled. You're pleased, and I'm pleased, and I don't care who isn't. But I'll do it all in form, and will call on Mr. Fanshawe to-morrow."

He glanced defiantly in the direction of his mother, and then put his arm round Minna's waist, and whirled her off in the gallop of the last figure.

So it was over, and Minna was engaged to Lord Fitz-John!

She never remembered how she got through the rest of the evening. She danced once or twice more with her accepted lover, and once or twice again when he and his mother had gone away; but, though acquitting herself correctly of all her steps and figures, felt in a state of stupor all the time. A strangely uncomfortable dreamy state it was, out of which she every now and then made a violent effort to stimulate herself with the recollection—the more stimulating that it always brought with it something not unlike a pang—that she was to be the wife of a peer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TOO LATE.

RAYMOND had told Minna that he would be asleep by the time she and her guests were at supper; but in reality he scarcely slept all that night. Memories of her, of how she had looked, of what she had said and done, floated unceasingly through his brain, making sleep well-nigh impossible; and in spite of the displeasure she had so recently caused him, he did not attempt to drive them away. But in truth his displeasure, so far as she was the object of it, had all evaporated now. He had been very unreasonably angry, and, like all unreasonable passions, his

anger in subsiding had left the elements of reaction behind it. He was scarcely out of her presence before he began to wonder what she had done that had made him use her so roughly. He understood from her last words that she was offended, and this made him understand also that till then her petulance had been all in sport. What a churl he had been! and, worse still, what a churl he must appear in her eyes! Then he remembered how prettily she always flushed up when she saw him, how persuasively she had spoken the other morning when she had asked him to come to the ball (she little knew what a barbarian she was inviting), how archly she had rallied him about not dancing at the very time he had been making himself most disagreeable. And as he thought of these things, her faults toward him dwindled down into Lilliputian proportions, while his toward her expanded till they filled all his mental horizon. But if she had indeed ever cared for him, there was still time to make amends by asking her pardon and confessing the secret of his moroseness. If his love was any thing to her, she would forgive offenses into which its very intensity had betrayed him. If not, why it was better that he should know the worst at once. He had endured suspense till he could endure no more, and he would put an end to it now at any cost.

Thus did Raymond Lee take the resolution before which he had so long paused.

Early in the afternoon of the following day he was on his way to the Fanshaws' house, in the hope of finding Minna at home and alone as he had found her the other morning. If she was not there, or if Mrs. Fanshawe was there too, he had made up his mind to write rather than incur farther delay, but he had an instinct that his best chance lay in seeing Minna face to face, and receiving her answer from her own lips, unbiased by Mrs. Fanshawe's influence.

It looked at first as if fortune were disposed to favor him. To his first query, whether Mrs. Fanshawe was at home, he received a reply in the negative (he little suspected that she was out spreading the news of Minna's engagement); and to his second, whether he could see Miss Fanshawe, the footman returned a doubtful answer which a well-timed *douceur* converted into an unhesitating affirmative. The fact was, my young lady had had a bad headache this morning, and had only just come down stairs, but she was at home—oh dear, yes! she was at home—and quite at leisure. Would Mr. Lee please to step this way? He was shown through the hall, where a man in an apron was filling a basket with crumpled paper rosebuds, to a little breakfast parlor at the back, which in the confusion made by last night's festivities—even the sanctity of Minna's boudoir had been invaded by something like a cart-load of surplus furniture—was for the time the only available reception-room.

Here Minna was sitting by herself, gazing dreamily away from the ~~piece~~ of embroidery she held in her hand at the flower-box outside the window, and, as Raymond observed when she raised her head, looking very pale.

His entrance evidently took her altogether by surprise. When his name was announced she started violently, and cast a quick nervous glance round the room, almost as though seeking a way

of escape. But none such presented itself, and without speaking she laid her hand for an instant in that which he held out to her, and then withdrew it to motion him to a chair. They both seated themselves in silence; for some seconds it seemed as if each had lost the faculty of speech. At last Minna found the oppression of the situation intolerable, and with an effort began—

"What nice weather we have to-day!"

Raymond did not answer; he was considering how to enter on a far more momentous topic. Perhaps Minna had some instinctive sense of what was in his mind, for again she looked round anxiously. But still no chance of rescue or escape was visible, and the next moment she heard Raymond's voice saying—

"Miss Fanshawe, I have come to ask you to forgive me for behaving as I did last night."

She half rose from her chair as though to fly from the room; then, almost powerless, sank back again, and murmured, with lips so tremulous that they could hardly articulate—

"Forgive you, Mr. Lee?"

"Yes—if you can. I was a brute, a savage—what you will. I was angry with you—angry with you for no better reason than that I was afraid you were beyond my reach. Can you forgive me for being afraid of that?"

"Mr. Lee!" she stammered.

He rose and came close to where she sat.

"Can you forgive me for loving you?" he asked, looking at her earnestly. "Can you forgive me for making you my one thought sleeping and waking, for making the hope of winning you the one thing worth living for?"

She did not wish to escape now. With him standing so near her, with his voice vibrating in her ear and her heart, she seemed to be under a magnetic spell which dissipated every impression save its own. The memory which had oppressed her with such terror a moment ago faded away like darkness before light; every idea, every sense, was merged in the consciousness that Raymond's voice was speaking and telling her that he loved her. She sat still, trembling and with bated breath, her eyes cast down, but with heart and soul straining themselves to listen.

His look was fastened on her face, and a thrill of hope rushed through him at what he read there.

"Minna," he whispered, "will you be my wife?"

The last word was like an electric shock to her, awakening her in an instant out of the dream in which she had been held spell-bound. She remembered that she was to be a wife, but not Raymond Lee's.

"Oh! do not ask me! do not speak to me. It is impossible. Oh! pray, pray let me go. It is quite impossible."

She stood up and tried to pass him; she would fain have fled from him, and, if she could, from herself too.

But Raymond's hopes had risen too high to let themselves be dashed down so easily. And then her very agitation gave him the encouragement that her words seemed to deny. He caught her hand impetuously.

"Impossible—why? Nothing but your will can make it impossible, you know. Is it impossible by your will?"

She tried to draw her hand away, but could

not. An explanation was necessary, and an explanation there must be.

"I am engaged," she said in a low voice which strove to be calm. "I am engaged to Lord Fitz-John."

She did not know why she added any thing to that first fact which alone Raymond had a right to be told, but it was because the word "Lord" had a reassuring sound of which in that moment she could not deny herself the comfort. When Moses Primrose brought home the spectacle-cases, he evidently laid great stress upon their being all shagreen. She knew that her sacrifice had been enormous, and liked to think that she had something to show for it.

Raymond Lee let go her hand as though its touch had burned him.

The name of Minna's betrothed had produced a very different effect on him from any on which she could have calculated. If she had said she was engaged to Captain Lennox or any other of the handsome young dandies whom he had, sometimes with a feeling of despair, seen hovering about her, he would have deemed such a choice, if unworthy of her, at least natural and explicable, and would have accepted his fate in respectful silence. But he had seen Lord Fitz-John at the ball last night, and knew that he could not be personally attractive in the eyes of any girl—dandy admirer or not. He had heard some of the current reports as to Lord Fitz-John's character and tastes (he remembered that Minna had heard them too), and knew that he was as much wanting in moral and intellectual as in external qualities. And putting all these things together, he could only conclude that Minna had sold herself for rank. The idea filled him with a contemptuous disgust which he made no effort to conceal.

"Lord Fitz-John!" he repeated, in a tone of such supreme and concentrated scorn that through all the confusion of her senses Minna was struck by it.

"What do you mean?" she asked faintly.

"I mean that I know the man can be nothing to you—except a future husband," he answered, losing all control over himself in the angry bitterness of his spirit. "I mean that I know you are selling yourself. Or letting others sell you, perhaps," he added eagerly, as the idea of Mrs. Fanshawe passed through his mind, bringing with it sudden relief. "If this is Mrs. Fanshawe's doing, for God's sake take care. What she advises is not for your good, but for her own ambition. A real mother would sooner see you dead than married to that man."

"A real mother!" faltered Minna. How had Raymond come to learn so much of her?

"Yes, I know that woman is not your mother, and I thank God for it. If only I could have known too that you had done your duty instead of consulting those who showed it to you, that you had gone home to your father when you heard he was pining after you . . . Oh! if they could have told me that too, I think it would have made me happier than to have been assured of Heaven. But now!—Minna, I used to be afraid of what you would think of my father; I have cause to be ashamed of him, I know; but now I see that you have more cause to be ashamed of your conduct toward yours."

Minna stood dumbfounded at these upbraid-

ings—so much amazed that for the time she had not even spirit to resent them. That Raymond should know the jealously guarded secret of her humble parentage was in itself a surprise that nearly overwhelmed her; yet more overwhelming still was it to find herself fallen in his estimation, not because her connections were vulgar and un-presentable, but because she claimed to be better than they. Actually, if she had taken the advice so impertinently tendered by that odious creature Joe, if she had exiled herself from all the elegancies and refinements of civilization to live in a sanded kitchen amid fumes of bro'th and tobacco smoke, she would have stood better in Raymond Lee's opinion than she did as Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe's daughter. The fact, as she gradually realized it, almost took away her breath.

"Minna, I may never meet you after to-day; your path is not my path—I ought to have seen that when I heard how you despised your father and your sister. But if others are persuading you in this matter, for the love of Heaven remember that those are not your friends who would have you the wife of a gambler and a drunkard. Do not think I am speaking for my own sake—I have given up all thought of you for myself, God knows."

Whether it was the disrespectful terms applied to her betrothed or the emphatic renunciation of herself that most galled her, Minna's spirit began to rise at this.

"Mr. Lee, you must not say these things to me!" she exclaimed vehemently. You have no right to speak to me in this manner—you know you have not."

"Have I not? Oh! to be sure, every body who speaks to you is expected to speak according to drawing-room rule and measure, I suppose. You torture people for your amusement, and then require them to keep their contortions within the bounds of elegance and decorum. If it comes to a question of right, I may ask what right had you to make me suffer as you have done? What right had you to feed my suspense from day to day with your pretty smiles and blushes, and then put an end to it at the last by telling me you have let yourself be promised to Lord Fitz-John? Lord Fitz-John of all men in the world! Lord Fitz-John!"

But the fierceness of his chiding, instead of overawing her into acquiescence in its justice, only increased the wrathfulness that was fast filling her heart against him. What! he dared to speak as if he alone had suffered, as if he alone had been kept in suspense! Had he not made her suffer last night? had he not made her watch and wait for him in vain from day to day? And now that he had let her slip through his hands, he came to mock her with an offer of his love, and, when he was told it was too late, presumed to reproach her with the consequences of his own tardiness. He thought of nobody but himself—the selfish, tyrannical, unjust man! And to talk of her smiles and blushes too! Then he had noticed something in her manner, and yet had delayed so long. But she would let him see that all that nonsense was over now.

"Mr. Lee, you are quite mistaken. I have not let myself be promised to any body against my will, and I beg you will not speak as if I had. I consider your remarks very insulting."

"You must forgive them to a man who has

just had the greatest mistake of his life disclosed to him," said Raymond bitterly. "I would as soon have believed in a river flowing backward to its source as in your being worldly and self-seeking, unless I had it from your own lips. It ought to have been enough for me to know how you had used your father and your sister, yet you see it was not. But I suppose I must believe now."

Minna was silent. He might believe what he liked, she told herself proudly. Worldly and self-seeking! So that was what he thought of her! Well, there was no accounting for people's notions.

He looked at her an instant, then turned abruptly and went toward the door. Here he paused, and looked again; it seemed as though he half expected that she would speak and defend herself. But she still stood silent, holding her head defiantly erect, and made no sign.

"What a hateful world we live in!" cried Raymond passionately as he withdrew his eyes. In another moment he was out of the room and out of the house, walking along in the pleasant sunshine, but receiving no ray of it into his soul, and feeling as if the source of light and brightness were extinguished forever. All creation seemed to have changed its aspect; there could be no goodness or beauty in it since what he had deemed best and most beautiful had proved unworthy. Minna had bartered herself for a title, and he felt for the time as though he must hate the whole world for her default. Had she not been as the whole world to him?

And how fared it with Minna meanwhile?

She did not retain her defiant attitude long. No sooner had the echoes of Raymond's footsteps died away than she sank wearily down on her chair, letting her head droop heavily forward, as one to whom life has become a burden. Yet she did not weep; the anger in her heart would have made her regard weeping as a humiliation. For though she had relaxed the outward show of defiance, she was angry with Raymond still—angry because he had dared to assail her with insolent and unmannerly reproaches, more angry yet perhaps because she felt that, spoken before, those reproaches might have saved her. But now they had come too late.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIRST KISS.

Too late indeed!

All preliminaries had been agreed upon that morning, and it was understood that Minna was to become Lady Fitz-John with as little delay as possible.

Her noble suitor had presented himself in Mr. Fanshawe's study at a laudably early hour, and demanded her hand in form. The required consent was given without difficulty; and Mr. Fanshawe added (having been so tutored by his wife in a long confabulation she had held with him before breakfast) that a fortune of twenty thousand pounds should be paid down with the bride, as an installment of the wealth of which some day she was to be sole heiress. Here already was one of the solid advantages which Minna's dazzling exploit had brought her. Had

she entered into an engagement less flattering to the ambition of her adopted mother, it is probable that she might have had to be content with a much more modest dowry; but after the admirable way in which she had acquitted herself, Mrs. Fanshawe would not rest until her husband had been coaxed and badgered into fixing the marriage portion at this magnificent figure. Lord Fitz-John, already pleased with the assertion he had made of his own will in the face of maternal dictation, was more pleased still with what he heard of his bride's pecuniary prospects, and did not allow his estimation of her to be at all affected by the explanation (necessary now that things had gone so far) of her exact status in the Fanshawe family. This was made in as few words as possible, being merely to the effect that she was the daughter of a sister of Mrs. Fanshawe's who had died in somewhat reduced circumstances. That she had a father and sister living, in somewhat reduced circumstances also, it was not considered requisite to add. Every thing being thus settled to mutual satisfaction, his lordship had taken leave in high spirits, promising to call again later in the day to see his betrothed, who at the time of his morning visit had been detained in her room with a bad headache.

When Raymond left her, Minna's first meeting with her affianced husband was still to come. But somehow the prospect did not seem to have a cheering tendency, and Mrs. Fanshawe, who shortly after Raymond's departure returned from a round of calls, found her looking very little better than she had left her.

"My dear child, how pale you are, to be sure!" she exclaimed, as she entered the room, her face radiant with excitement and gorgeous bonnet strings. "Is your head worse again? You must try not to be so excitable, really—poor darling! He has not been here yet, of course?"

Minna shook her head. She knew that Mrs. Fanshawe's pronoun referred to Lord Fitz-John, and she did not think it necessary to mention Raymond's visit.

"Take care of yourself, pet. Well, they are all so surprised, you have no idea, and not over well pleased, some of them, I rather fancy. But they are so full of their congratulations—oh! I can't tell you. My dear darling child!"

She folded Minna to her heart in ecstasy; she felt positively grateful to her for the *début* which the Fitz-John alliance would be the means of bringing on the family.

"And now I must try to tell you all about it, love," she went on, seating herself by the future pegrass's side. "Well, I called first on Mrs. Jones—I think we must give up the Joneses now, but one needn't be in a hurry, and it's natural to like hearing what people have got to say . . . There, I shouldn't wonder if that's him."

The visitor's bell, set in motion by an impatient hand, was sounding loudly through the house.

"I can't see him, mamma," said Minna, rising hastily. "Make some excuse for me, please. I can't see him."

"My dear, what are you thinking of? Sit down again directly. You know very well you must see him, so it is no good to be childish about it."

Yes, certainly she must see the accepted lover who had come to pay his first visit. She under-

stood the necessity, and let herself sink back on her chair again. But she was looking paler than ever.

The door of the room was flung open, and the visitor was announced.

"Lord Fitz-John."

And immediately afterward Minna found her betrothed standing before her on the very place where so lately Raymond had stood.

"Well, Minna—I may call you that now."

She had just strength to rise and put out her hand. He took it in his and kept it; and though her first impulse was to tear it away, she was obliged to restrain herself, remembering that he had a right to hold it if he would.

He stood for a while looking into her beautiful face with as much admiration as his stolid eyes were capable of expressing—his steady gaze was uncomfortable to her, but she knew she must not resent it—and then he said—

"This would have been all very well yesterday, you know, but surely I am to have something more now."

She quite understood what it was that he was claiming, and in a kind of terror turned her head to cast an appealing look toward Mrs. Fanshawe. Must she consent to this? the appealing look said.

But Mrs. Fanshawe only smiled and nodded.

"Certainly, my dear, Lord Fitz-John is quite right."

Lord Fitz-John did not wait for farther permission, and in another moment she felt his lips on her cheek, and at the same time was conscious of something like a shudder. But she knew that what Mrs. Fanshawe said was true—he was entitled to kiss his future wife—and she did not let the inner rebellion show itself.

Still if Lord Fitz-John had been very observant, he might have noticed that, contrary to the wont of lovers' kisses in general, this first kiss of his had left her cheek as perfectly pale as it had been before.

He took a chair and seated himself. Minna noticed with a sense of relief that a corner of the table was between them.

"Dear me, only to think of my being all this time with my bonnet on!" cried Mrs. Fanshawe, with a little start as though she had just made the discovery. "How absent I am, to be sure! But I dare say you will excuse me for a short time, won't you?"

And, with a titter which to one of her hearers was inexpressibly distasteful, she left the room, not having so much as seen the imploring glance which Minna sent after her. But if she had, it would have been all the same. It was according to universal rule and precedent that an engaged couple should be left a little to themselves, and Mrs. Fanshawe was a stickler for rule and precedent in all things.

The absence of the third party did not loosen the lovers' tongues at once.

Minna reflected with satisfaction that it was not necessary for her to speak first, and Lord Fitz-John was wondering what the devil he should start with. He admired Minna vastly, and was immensely proud of his own pluck and spirit in securing her as the future Lady Fitz-John, since a Lady Fitz-John there must be; yet in the midst of his admiration of her and himself, he could not help thinking of a certain little Coralie of his acquaintance, and admitting that this correct sort of work was rather slow in comparison.

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At last he remembered that he had something to say, but it was about no topic more exciting than his mother. He had never been reduced to talk of his mother to Coralie.

"By the way, Miss Fanshawe—Minna that is"—he began, fumbling with a piece of embroidery-work which lay unfinished on the table. "I've got a message for you. My mother would like to see you at luncheon to-morrow—one o'clock or thereabouts. That will suit you, I suppose?"

It passed through Minna's mind that, in all engagements she had ever heard of, the gentleman's relations came to call on the lady before asking her to call on them. But her engagement was different from other engagements, and she understood that she must not be too exacting.

"Yes, that will suit me very well. Please to tell Lady Fitz-John that I shall be sure to do myself the pleasure of being with her."

"You may find her rather stiff at first, perhaps, but you mustn't mind that. She is so preciously high and mighty in her ideas, you see—quite different from me. I never could make out the use of being proud, for my part."

"Indeed!" said Minna, and for the first time since the entrance of her betrothed she felt herself beginning to color. What did he mean by telling her he was not proud?

"Oh no! I hate all that sort of humbug. But the old lady will come round nicely in time, you needn't be afraid of that. She's broken in wonderfully since the morning; there was a regular row at first, but Mr. Fanshawe coming down so handsomely has made all the difference. She's sharp enough to know that blood is not quite every thing—not at all events for poor people like us."

Minna's cheeks were crimson now.

"And I say, you won't bring Mrs. Fanshawe with you—not just yet, you understand? We must not try my mother's temper too much at first, eh? ha! ha!"

He laughed a great hearty laugh, in which, however, Minna could not by any effort bring herself to join. She might have known before, if she had thought of it, that Lady Fitz-John would look down upon her and her family, but she had preferred not to think of it hitherto. And now that the fact was forced upon her, she felt cruelly degraded and humiliated. Still she had the sense to understand that here was one of the penalties of being betrothed to a lord, and that she must bear it patiently.

She did not answer except by a faint smile; and as Lord Fitz-John had now exhausted himself on the subject, a long pause followed, during which he was examining a corner of her embroidery, and she was trifling with her watch-chain. Each felt the silence to be awkward, but neither knew how to break it.

"Hum. This is your work, I suppose?" said the young man at last. "And what is it to be when it's finished?"

"A collar and a pair of cuffs. But you don't understand any thing about such things, do you?" answered Minna with a ghastly attempt at archness.

"I can't say I do. It must be a prodigious bore, I should think. I can't make out how you stand it."

"One must put up with being bored sometimes."

No sooner had the words passed her lips than

she hoped that Lord Fitz-John would not think she had intended any thing personal.

"Ah yes! so one must," he agreed sympathizingly. "This is what you call your work-box, I suppose?"

And on receiving an affirmative reply, he asserted his rights as an accepted suitor by beginning to pull about the contents.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked, as he carefully poised a reel of thread on the top of another. "They say Whirlwind has fallen lame. If that's the case, it will turn all the betting upside down, you know."

"Indeed! Oh! but I am so stupid—I understand absolutely nothing about these things."

"Ah! to be sure." And being shut up in this direction, his lordship relapsed into silence.

Minna trifled with her watch-chain again. So this was a lover's *tête-à-tête*, was it? She had often read of such things in books, but she was obliged to admit to herself that this did not at all correspond to the description. Whereupon she began to wonder how it would have been if Raymond had been the lover; would the reality have fallen so far short of the ideal then? But though she asked herself this question, she dared not answer it.

"I see Tennyson is going to bring out a new poem," she said hastily, feeling that it was her turn to contribute something to the conversation.

"I am so glad, are not you?"

"Oh! I don't know—I've got no time for reading poetry."

"And I have very little, I am sorry to say. But I always make a point of reading Tennyson."

"Oh! of course, every body does—a—I do myself—a—to a certain extent, you know. The Corsair and Locksley Hall, and all that, eh?"

Locksley Hall! Minna thought of Locksley Hall, and felt sure that if Lord Fitz-John had known what he was talking about he would not have brought up such a reminiscence. And the subject of Tennyson's new poem dropped, as the subject of Whirlwind's lameness had dropped before.

A little longer the lover sat, apparently interested in nothing so much as in the interior economy of Minna's work-box; then, looking at his watch, suddenly discovered that it was time for him to be off, as he had an appointment with some fellows which he could not get out of. Minna did not press him to remain, and he took leave, not, however, forgetting to exercise his rights by kissing her once more at parting.

She had never in her life been more inclined for a good fit of crying than she was when she found herself alone again. But she considered the inclination the sign of a contemptible and degrading weakness, and would not yield to it. What! cry when all the young ladies of St. Austin's were envying her? And after Mr. Lee had behaved so abominably! No, indeed!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COLD SHADE.

THE next day at the appointed hour, Minna—alone, but in great state—found herself driving through the gates of Fitz-John Park.

She had been trying all the way to persuade herself that she was not afraid of the approaching

interview with the august lady with whom she was to be so closely allied, but in truth the prospect made her feel very far from comfortable. She was afraid, there could be no doubt about it; otherwise she would not have repeated to herself so often as she did that there was nothing to be afraid of. Neither perhaps would she have insisted so much on the fact that Lady Fitz-John was in no way inherently different from other people, if she had been quite assured that the fact was so. Minna was not naturally a coward or diffident of her own merits; but she had been brought up with a great respect for titles.

The carriage drew up presently in front of a richly carved stone archway which was the principal entrance to the house, and Minna was assisted to alight. She was in a state of great trepidation and nervousness, and yet in the midst of it all, a ray of comfort entered her soul as her eye glanced over the grand baronial-looking portal, not forgetting to rest for a moment on the moss-grown stone shield, sculptured with the Fitz-John arms, which surmounted it. If all the blood of all the Fitz-Johns had flowed in her veins, she could not have felt more loyally proud of the venerable old family mansion than she did now as she passed under its roof. What would Mr. Lee say if he could see her reigning in a place like this?

She was received with profound deference (another ray of comfort here) by the Fitz-John retainers, and was ushered up the broad oak stair-case and through the solemnly sombre drawing-room, into an inner sanctuary, where no visitors were admitted except a privileged few for the purpose of a private audience. But on crossing the threshold of this chamber, all sense of dignity and self-importance died away, and she felt all at once utterly forlorn and helpless.

For here the Dowager Lady Fitz-John was sitting in all her majesty. Nobody was by to keep Minna in countenance—not even her betrothed, his mother having arranged with him that she should first see the bride elect in private. The poor bride elect! No sooner had the servant closed the door on her than a stifling feeling of durance and restraint came over her, and at the same time a wild longing for fresh air and liberty. But alas! how was liberty possible now? If the yoke of noble kindred and a noble name was heavy, had she not voluntarily submitted herself to it?

Lady Fitz-John rose with dignified courtesy, eyeing Minna much as an affably disposed jailer may eye a newly arrived prisoner; then, putting forth her hand, gave her a stately welcome.

"I am glad to see you, Miss Fanshawe, and am much obliged to you for being so punctual. Pray sit down. It is very pleasant out-of-doors, I suppose."

"Very," said Minna, seating herself humbly. She understood that Lady Fitz-John intended to patronize her, and, though she did not like being patronized, was grateful that matters were no worse.

"I have desired a few minutes' private interview with you, Miss Fanshawe," pursued Lady Fitz-John, bowing graciously, "because, as you may understand, I feel under the circumstances greatly interested in you."

Minna reddened, but said nothing. She knew very well that Lady Fitz-John would not have

talked of feeling interested in a young lady of her own rank whom her son was going to marry, but then she knew also that she was not of Lady Fitz-John's own rank.

"Yes, very greatly interested—it is only natural that I should," continued her ladyship, as though making a little apology to herself. "I need not tell you that the marriage of an only son is an event to which every mother must look forward with more or less of anxiety."

Minna made a little inclination of the head, not knowing what else to do.

"And you may imagine how much that anxiety must be increased when not merely the happiness of a son, but the honor and well-being of an ancient family are at stake. You may imagine how desirous we must be—I and all mothers situated as I am—to find the character of the lady chosen sufficiently elevated and dignified to support all future responsibilities. I hope that yours is such, Miss Fanshawe—I hope and believe that it is."

"I hope so," stammered Minna, understanding that she was expected to say something. But she had never felt less elevated and dignified than she did at this moment.

"I will not conceal from you," went on Lady Fitz-John with beautiful candor, "that if it had rested with me, I might have looked for my son's wife in a different quarter. But he has made his choice, and I accept it."

She waved her hand gracefully as a kind of visible endorsement of her words, and resumed more amicably, thinking of Mr. Fanshawe's twenty thousand pounds—

"I will not say even but that I approve it. If my son's happiness and the dignity of his rank are secured, I care for nothing more; and I can not doubt that for these you will do every thing in your power—perhaps more than would be done by others. I have often heard that nothing so insures the attachment of a wife as the knowledge that her husband has made a sacrifice for her sake, and certainly it ought to be so."

Is the sacrifice all on his side then? thought Minna bitterly; but she remained silent, and Lady Fitz-John doubtless regarded silence as assent.

Having thus taken Minna to her heart as a daughter-in-law, she became a little more cordial.

"And now, my dear, there are some matters of detail on which I should like to say a few words to you. Albert tells me that every thing is to be concluded as soon as possible—it is natural that he should be impatient, I suppose—and it is not too early to begin thinking over the arrangements. Let me see—it can not take place much before the end of summer, of course; your own preparations will require quite two or three months."

"Oh yes! quite that," said Minna eagerly.

"Then by that time the Mount-Hetherington people will be back from London. That is fortunate, for I should think Lord Mount-Hetherington, after the families have so long been neighbors, might be persuaded to let us have two of the younger girls for bridesmaids—he is a very good-natured man, and there is such a family of them. Lady Flora and Lady Adeline, perhaps—it would be a day's amusement for them, and would give the occasion more prestige

than we could otherwise hope for. The wedding must take place from your house, of course"—here Lady Fitz-John sighed a resigned sigh, as though at a necessary evil—"yes, of course it must; but I dare say that will make no difference. The Earl is so good-natured."

Minna knew that in forming these plans Lady Fitz-John was infringing on her own most ordinary rights as a bride elect, but she was too much cowed to resist the interference. She did not like being taken in hand thus, but after all, under the circumstances, it seemed only natural. She had parted with herself to the Fitz-Johns—"sold herself" was Raymond's phrase, which now recurred to her with astonishing distinctness—and she need not be surprised to find the Fitz-Johns entering into possession. So she took the Earl's good nature with becoming meekness, and Lady Fitz-John continued—

"And if we get the Mount-Hetherington girls, I think we may hope that the Miss Newtons will not refuse us. The Honorable Miss Newtons, you know, my dear; their mother, Lady Amelia, daughter of the Marquis of Porkington, is a very old and intimate friend of mine. I must take you to call there with me some day; the family is altogether one whose friendship I should particularly wish you to secure."

Minna did not find it pleasant to have Lady Fitz-John choosing her friends for her thus, but felt that surprise or resentment would be entirely unreasonable. What more natural than that the head keeper should require the assistant keepers to be of her own selection?

"The Miss Newtons and the Mount-Hetherington girls would only make four, and the procession must not be less than six, of course—eight is what I should prefer. But I will think of that afterward, my dear. We have a set of very kind neighbors in this county, and we shall manage it all very nicely, I have no doubt. And now suppose we go to luncheon, it must be quite ready by this time. Albert is down stairs; I told him to wait for us in the dining-room."

The last words were spoken by her ladyship as though she were holding forth the promise of an immense treat. And as such, no doubt, Minna ought to have regarded the prospect of seeing her betrothed; yet, notwithstanding that she ought, she did not. She drew her breath quickly, and Lady Fitz-John thought that her nerves were in a flutter of agreeable expectation, but in truth she was wondering with a suppressed shudder whether she would have to endure another kiss from him. Surely she had been going through quite enough for that morning.

She had nothing to say, however, that could gain her a respite, and submissively accompanied her entertainer down stairs. In the dining-room they found luncheon ready laid, with two dignified footmen waiting to do the honors; while at the farther end of the room, looking out of the window with his hands in his pockets, stood Lord Fitz-John. He drew forth his hands when Minna made her appearance, and wheeling round from the window, gave her one of them.

Minna felt positively grateful to the dignified footmen for what they had spared her.

The luncheon was a very stiff ceremonious affair, as cold as the very cold and somewhat lean fowl which was the *pièce de résistance*. Minna had never been more solemnly uncomfort-

able in her life than when she sat down on a chair held for her by a gravely officiating attendant, with a wide tract of white table-cloth spread imposingly but frugally before her, at one end of which presided the young lord and at the other her future mother-in-law. Nor did things get better as the repast went on. Every thing was constrained and hushed and formal—even Lord Fitz-John, who, now that Minna was regularly recognized by his mother, had lost one great incentive for exerting himself to pay her particular attention, and who probably found the whole proceeding a decided bore. The chief weight of the conversation, such as it was, devolved *ex officio* on the hostess, who every now and then addressed the visitor with a question or remark. But, cold and perfunctory as her share of the discourse seemed to be, Minna saw that she had an object in it—namely, to find out as nearly as possible her guest's exact social calibre.

"You have not been to town this season, I think, Miss Fanshawe. You do not go every year, perhaps?"

"We only spend a fortnight or so there occasionally—once in every two or three years."

"Ah! (A minute's pause, devoted to cold fowl.) And when you go, where do you usually stay? Or are you with friends?"

"With friends generally. Papa has relations in London."

"Ah! In what neighborhood?"

"They live in Russell Square."

"Ah! (Cold fowl again for a longer interval than before.) When you have been in town, have you ever happened to meet the Harrington-Drummonds?"

"I don't think we ever have."

"Or the St. Quintins? The St. Quintins of Waterhead, I mean."

"No—at least not that I know of."

"Ah!—Dear me, I thought the St. Quintins went almost everywhere."

And then came dead silence for some minutes, during which Minna had the comfortable consciousness that Lady Fitz-John was actively making mental notes to her disadvantage.

At last, when a variety of questions of this kind had been asked and answered, the dreary repast was brought to a close; and Minna, in the act of wondering how she should get away, was relieved by hearing Lady Fitz-John say—

"I am sorry that I shall have to ask you to excuse me, but I have a very particular engagement to-day for three o'clock. By the way, how do you manage about going home? can we offer you a carriage?"

Apparently she could resist no opportunity of crushing Minna under the weight of her patronage.

"Thank you, you are very good. But mamma's carriage is waiting for me."

"Ah! that is convenient. Mrs. Fanshawe is well, I hope?"

It was the only inquiry she had vouchsafed concerning Mrs. Fanshawe's health, and it was made in such a way that Minna would have preferred it to have been omitted.

She did not show any resentment, however, and took leave of her ladyship very respectfully. She was then handed into her carriage by her august lover, once more escaping a kiss—*every time this happened she felt as though she*

had made a positive gain—owing to the friendly presence of the servants.

"I say," he whispered, as he took her hand at parting, "I shan't be able to see you again to-day, you know—positively not a minute to spare. But I'll try my best to call at your place to-morrow—that will do, eh? Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Minna as the carriage rolled off.

The relief that it was to be outside the baronial-looking portal she had been so proud of entering! the relief that it was to be alone again and to know that at least till to-morrow she was free!

But the feeling of temporary liberty soon brought with it another feeling of permanent servitude and degradation. The more she enjoyed the sense of present freedom, the more she was oppressed by the sense of being after all but a prisoner on parole, and the more intolerable she felt the pressure of the invisible chains which, as she knew, still bound her. The farther she was carried from the awe-inspiring presence of Lady Fitz-John, the clearer grew her comprehension of the humiliating way in which she had been treated, and the keener her resentment, not so much against Lady Fitz-John as against her own self. The poor, weak, mean, servile creature that she had become in accepting greatness! And yet what could she do? She had accepted it, and must accept its penalties likewise. What could she do? She was angry: she was ashamed; but in the midst of it all she felt herself helpless.

On her arrival at home she could not altogether conceal her dissatisfaction from Mrs. Fanshawe, whom she found overflowing with questions as to how she had got on.

"Mamma, I don't think Lady Fitz-John behaves well at all."

"My darling! Why, what did she say?"

"Oh! I can't describe exactly what she said. But she ought not to have invited me there to-day all by myself; it was not using me well, or you either. And she never asked after you, mamma, until just as I was going away, and—"

"Nonsense, my dear. It was very good of you to think of me, I'm sure, but for my own part I have too much common sense to feel such a thing for a moment."

She was too much delighted, poor woman, at the prospect of having a lord for a son-in-law, to stickle about details. And then would not the future Lady Fitz-John compensate her for all the slights which she might have to put up with from the dowager?

"There are a great many allowances to be made for a woman of her ideas, my love. Of course she had looked higher for her son, and feels a little disappointed, I have no doubt. You must learn not to mind such things."

"I shall never learn to mind being looked down upon, mamma," said Minna, flashing up suddenly. "I don't want to enter any family where I am to be despised, and I wonder what possessed me not to tell her so, that I do."

But even while she bravadoed thus, she felt that it was part of her cowardice to be so valiant behind the enemy's back.

"Minna, Minna, how can you go on so? I

would not have believed you could be so silly. In this world we are not to expect to have things quite our own way, and I'm sure *you* have good reason to think yourself well off. Look at the position you are about to attain. I declare it is downright ungrateful to Providence to go on carping as you do."

Minna did not answer; she knew she had only been indulging in a piece of declamation, and then the argument about "position" sounded so incontrovertible.

Yet perhaps she was not quite so convinced as she thought herself. She said nothing, but the question passed hazily through her mind—what was her position to be? And the answer passed through her mind too—very hazily likewise, for she would not put it into words even in the inmost recesses of her own thoughts. Why, to be the life-companion of the heavy-eyed, stolid-featured young man from whom she had been so glad to get away just now, to be looked down upon and patronized by a mother-in-law too magnificent to quarrel with, to preside daily at three or four meals, every one of them as stiff and ponderous and oppressive as that morning's luncheon, occasionally to go into company and be pointed at as the fortunate daughter of a St. Austin's trader. And all this when she might have been the wife of Raymond Lee! Such a misgiving was too mortifying to be harbored long, but for the moment it seemed to her as though she had made a terrible shipwreck of her life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CONQUERING HERO.

YET, though the misgiving was always thrust out of sight as soon as possible, it recurred a great many times during the next few weeks.

Considering in what her tastes had hitherto consisted, this period ought to have been for Minna one of almost paradisaical bliss, for it was the period of selecting the trousseau and receiving the anticipatory congratulations of friends and acquaintances. From morning to night she was surrounded with tribute to her newly acquired greatness, in the shape of palpable splendor of dress and jewelry, and impalpable incense of flattery and ill-concealed envy. Her day was a constant round of consultations with dress-makers and milliners, exchanges of morning calls with awe-struck neighbors, deliberative fingerings of rich velvets, silks, and laces—sometimes diversified by a visit from her exalted suitor, and sometimes, but more rarely, by a luncheon at Fitz-John Court. But, comparatively small as were the actual claims made on her time and attention by the Fitz-Johns, the idea of the Fitz-Johns pervaded her life, filling her spirit with a never-ceasing sense of oppression and captivity. It was the one bitter drop in her cup of sweets which spoiled the flavor of the whole. If she could have attained the honors belonging to a peer's bride without the intervention of a bridegroom, she might have been happy; but, as it was, all her enjoyment was tainted by a consciousness of servitude and bondage. The feeling of durance which had fallen upon her on entering Lady Fitz-John's audience-chamber never thoroughly left her in the midst

of what seemed her triumph, and would at times increase till it was almost unbearable.

The inner dissatisfaction which now for the first time had taken possession of her made several strange changes in Minna's mode of viewing her life and its conditions.

She had never had so little time for thinking as she had now, and yet she was thinking constantly, whereas before she had scarcely ever thought seriously at all. From losing her pleasure in the frivolities which had hitherto sufficed to interest her, she began to find them tedious and burdensome; and from finding them burdensome, she began to ask herself what they were good for. What was the use of it all—the visiting, and the dressing three times a day, and the note-writing, and the fuss about the trimmings, and the questions of high body or low body, plain sleeves or slashed sleeves—what was the use of it all, what purpose was there in it? To please herself? Certainly not, it worried her to death. Then to please other people? Yet not exactly that either, but to produce a certain impression on them. And what were the other people to her? Nothing, less than nothing. They never had done any thing for her, never would do any thing for her. They had stared when they heard she was to marry Lord Fitz-John, as she had intended that they should stare, but what was she the happier for their staring? What was she the happier for anything that they said and thought of her—for any thing that they could say and think? And yet she had let her whole life be governed by those people, had erected their opinion into a standard by which all her actions should be adjusted, had spent almost every hour of every day in endeavoring directly or indirectly to influence their judgment of her. This was what was meant by being worldly, probably. "Worldly and self-seeking" she had been called once. Well, self-seeking was the right word, perhaps, but surely more unsuccessful self-seeking there could not be. If she had been worldly, then worldliness resulted in the supreme abnegation and sacrifice of self. Oh the slavery of it all, the tedious drudgery!

It will be seen that her sense of bondage to the Fitz-Johns made Minna for the first time sensible of the pressure of other fetters which, garlanded as they had been till now by the flowers of youth and hope, she had never yet been aware of.

In her weariness of what seemed to her the servitude of her lot, she actually began to think with something like envy of so insignificant a person as Amy. Amy lived in a sanded kitchen, but she was free, with no visits of ceremony to take up her time, no superfluous dresses or dressing to worry her, no position in society to keep up, no hostile drawing-room criticism to deprecate, no fashionable acquaintances to astound by a brilliant match, no circle of chaperons to scandalize by healthy self-assertion—Amy lived in a sanded kitchen, but she was free. Happy, happy Amy! And to think that Amy's heritage of freedom had once been hers too, might have become hers again—up to the moment when she had finally parted with her independence of action by pledging herself to Lord Fitz-John—if she had only chosen to claim it. She had a right no less than Amy to that sanded kitchen,

that blessed asylum of peace and liberty. Was it possible that she had made a mistake in not preferring it to Mrs. Fanshawe's drawing-room? Mr. Lee thought that she had, and had reproved her for it with brutal rudeness—reproved her as she had never been reprovèd in her life before. He would have sought her out, then, in that humble home; he would not have been deterred by her father's tobacco smoke or country accent. Ah! how he must have loved her, surely! Such love had almost a right to be rude. Nobody would ever care for her again as he had done. But that was all over now.

And then she would break off hastily as though afraid of the subject, and try very hard to interest herself in the quality of the *moire antique* she was choosing, or the congratulations of the lady she was sitting with. But almost always in dismissing the idea of Raymond (and she had to dismiss it very often) a little involuntary sigh would escape her which must sometimes have struck the shopman or lady visitor as rather irrelevant. For her first resentment against Raymond had gradually faded away; and, while she continued to tell herself that he had behaved very ill and had taken her to task with unwarrantable freedom, she was able to think over every word of what he had said—and every word seemed to be still ringing in her ears—without any anger or bitterness, unless indeed with her own destiny. Her feeling now was that she and Raymond were companions in misfortune—both victims of an untoward combination of circumstances; and she would occasionally be conscious of pitying him almost as sometimes she pitied herself.

Meanwhile the weeks of summer were passing on; and, with something of the feelings of a martyr watching the gradual but inevitable rising of the tide which is to devour him, and trying to believe that it will translate him to glory, Minna saw the day draw nearer and nearer which was to make her the wife of Lord Fitz-John.

The marriage was fixed to take place at the end of August; and, with what seemed to her unprecedented rapidity, the months of June and July slipped away, and the first days of August followed. A fortnight more, and the wedding-day would be upon her.

But first, about the middle of August, an event was to occur which probably occupied quite as large a place in Lord Fitz-John's thoughts as his approaching marriage, and in which Minna dutifully forced herself to take some faint kind of interest. This was the Grand Imperial County Stakes, the principal race of the —shire Annual Meeting, and for which a horse of Lord Fitz-John's was this year entered. For days and even weeks beforehand the lover had been able to talk of little or nothing but his horse and its chances of winning; and, the course not being more than fourteen or fifteen miles distant from St. Austin's, Minna and Mrs. Fanshawe had felt themselves obliged to promise that they would go to witness its performances. Nor indeed did Minna find the necessity of going any particular hardship. Any change in her daily routine of occupations and ideas was welcome just now, and she did her very best to get up a little excitement for the occasion, and to feel a due amount of loyal interest in the fortunes of Scourer.

But neither such enthusiasm as she could muster, nor the fresh air of the —shire downs, was quite able to dispel the languor which had recently shown itself in her bearing; and as the carriage containing her and Mrs. Fanshawe took up its station near the race-course, she was looking several shades paler than of old. This was immediately noticed by a charitable observer, and a familiar voice exclaimed—

"You are well, my dear, I hope? you are looking rather out of sorts. Out of spirits, I should almost have said, only I know that's quite impossible—he! he! he! But she is looking sadly pale, isn't she, Mrs. Fanshawe?"

The speaker was Mrs. Vesey, whom Minna to her horror discovered installed in a carriage drawn up close to Mrs. Fanshawe's. With her were seated Arabella and Mrs. Hodgetts, to the latter of whom indeed the carriage belonged, for Mrs. Vesey had learned to despise the hospitality of nobody who could afford to dispense it liberally.

"Dear Mrs. Hodgetts wanted so to see the races, and really I felt it would be quite unkind to refuse," went on Mrs. Vesey with a skillful ambiguity which might have led an uninitiated hearer to suppose that she had taken Mrs. Hodgetts rather than that Mrs. Hodgetts had taken her. "And then I thought perhaps we might meet you—the temptation was not to be resisted. Not that I approve of such entertainments; very, very far from it; the coarseness, the vulgarity, the profanity of the racing world I consider quite dreadful; but as I tell Arabella, it is as well to see something of all sides of life, and then we know what to avoid as well as what to admire. It is sad to see rational beings in such a state of eagerness and excitement all about a few horses, is it not?"

She sighed, and, putting up her eye-glass, surveyed the jostling crowd of trainers, jockeys, gentlemen-connoisseurs, thimble-riggers, gipsies male and female, cake-venders, and peaceable half-frightened-looking citizens out for a day's holiday, with an air beautifully compounded of curiosity, pity, and disgust. Minna had never heard Mrs. Vesey find fault with any aristocratic amusement before; and, understanding very well that this denunciation of the turf was intended to signify the virtuous reprobation in which all respectable people must hold Lord Fitz-John, she felt excessively indignant—all the more so that she knew her indignation to be entirely useless and impotent. She could not defend herself unless she was attacked, and there was no chance of Mrs. Vesey attacking her directly. She could not even escape; the horses were already taken out of the carriage, so that there was no possibility of making a change of position on any pretext. But the idea of sitting there helplessly as a target for Mrs. Vesey's venom-tipped shafts was something dreadful.

"Very, very melancholy," commented Mrs. Vesey, with her glass still up.

"But they seem to be enjoying themselves, don't they?" said Mrs. Hodgetts, more disposed to optimism in her views.

"Enjoying themselves! Ah yes! and that is just the most melancholy part of it. But just look yonder—I declare I think I see Lord Fitz-John, is it not, Miss Fanshawe? Standing near that Punch and Judy thing, you know, and talk-

ing with those two—hem—gentlemen with the little books. Eh? You must see him, my dear, I'm sure."

Minna saw him certainly, though he did not yet see her, and she saw also the two companions to whom Mrs. Vesey had so politely accorded the title of gentlemen. The latter belonged decidedly to the type which is understood by the expressive adjective "horsy." It was curious to see how this quality showed itself unmistakably under diametrically opposite conditions of appearance and costume. One of the men was florid, with very large whiskers, the other sallow and with no whiskers at all. One made a great display of dashing waistcoat and Albert chain, the other wore a loose and rather shabby-looking greatcoat covering all the upper part of his person, and leaving the existence of linen problematical. Externally the two had nothing in common except that each carried in his hand a little book which he occasionally paused to consult. And yet, in spite of this apparent dissimilarity, there was an undefinable something about them that stamped them both as homogeneous. The man with the Albert chain was splendid, and the man with the loose greatcoat was seedy, but one felt instinctively that they were precisely of the same grade. And if any confirmation of this theory had been required, it would have been supplied by the manner of Lord Fitz-John, which was equally familiar and confidential toward both.

The group remained for some two or three minutes engaged in earnest conversation, and then the little books were returned to the pockets of their respective owners, and the trio sauntered forward, still talking, but not quite so earnestly. The direction which they took brought them close to the Fanshawes' carriage.

"Hollo!" exclaimed Lord Fitz-John, suddenly discovering his proximity to his betrothed. "So here you are, are you? why, I've been looking about for you for the last half hour."

He took up his place by the carriage door, leaning his elbows upon it, while the two men fell a pace or two behind.

"We've just been to look at Scourer," he began, without giving himself time even to shake hands. "He's in the primest order—fit to bowl over the whole field, by George; and I'm a Dutchman if he don't, that's more. Little Bob Flad makes cock-sure of bringing him in first, and if any man can do it, it's little Bob."

"Who is little Bob?" Minna heard Mrs. Hodgetts whisper.

"My dear Mrs. Hodgetts, how am I to tell? Oh no! I can assure you that the affairs of the turf are quite a sealed book to me and to Arabella too—dear girl. Miss Fanshawe will tell us afterward, perhaps."

"And that isn't the only news I've got for you," pursued his lordship, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper. "My friends here have just had a private view of Hotspur—the only one who could have done any thing against Scourer, you know—and they say he's off his feed. We needn't be afraid of Hotspur, need we, Denton?" he went on, turning to one of his companions.

"Afraid! Bless your heart, miss, I should think not," said the person addressed, who seemed to suppose that his services were required to

reassure the lady. "You mark my words, he's as dickey on his legs as ever was."

"And Denton knows a thing or two about horseflesh," said the young lover approvingly. "Eh? Denton's a knowing one, isn't he, Clarkson?"

Mr. Clarkson, thus appealed to, laid his forefinger sagaciously on the side of his nose, and, looking very hard at Minna, closed one eye for the space of half a minute. The gesture was evidently meant as an extraordinarily emphatic affirmative. Nor was he content with this testimony to his friend's merits, for he leaned forward confidentially, and whispered behind his hand—

"He and me were the only two out of all the talent last year that saw any thing in Express. And if that wasn't finding out a good thing, I wish I may never know a crack again when I see him."

Minna's first impulse was to shrink away in unconcealed disgust. What right had those horrid men with their sporting slang and smell of tobacco smoke to intrude their confidences on her with such odious familiarity? But she remembered that they were Lord Fitz-John's friends, and that he had virtually introduced them—yes, they had a kind of right to her after all. So she smiled faintly, with an effort to conceal her repulsion, which did but increase it tenfold.

"I say, it's time to be off," interposed Mr. Denton, looking at his watch. "Come along, you two, or you'll be losing some of the fun."

"Here I am," said the patron. "Good-bye, Minna, I'll come and see you again when it's over."

"Good-bye, miss," said Mr. Clarkson, touching his hat.

And the three companions hurried away to the scene of action.

"Oh, Miss Fanshawe, Mrs. Hodgetts and I are perfectly dying with curiosity to know who little Bob Flad is. I didn't like to ask you at the time, for I saw that those gentlemen had something very particular to say to you. But who is little Bob Flad? It is no secret, I hope?"

"Not that I know of," said Minna coldly. "I believe it is the name of the man who is to ride Lord Fitz-John's horse."

"Oh! I see. You will excuse our curiosity, I am sure, but the name sounded so droll. Only look what they are doing over there! Something is going to begin, I suppose. We must trust to you, dear Miss Fanshawe, to give us a little hint from time to time of what it is all about—we are such sad ignorant folks, you know."

The business of the day now began, and the race-course became the point of attraction for all eyes. There were some rather celebrated horses entered for the different contests, the course was in the best possible order, and the running was more than usually interesting; altogether the meeting was pronounced by the initiated the most successful ever held on that ground. Nor were the uninitiated less satisfied, the bright sunshine and light summer breeze combining with the surrounding bustle and excitement to quicken the pulses of the most apathetic. Even Minna felt almost inclined to enjoy herself as she sat, with the blue sky overhead and the fresh air on her cheek, watching the flying forms that glided rather than moved over the course; and probably

she would have enjoyed herself if Mrs. Vesey had only let her. But a succession of well-directed stabs from that lady put all enjoyment effectually out of the question, and not even the triumphant winning of the Grand Imperial County Stakes by Scourer had power to inspire her with the slightest elation. And yet surely nothing could have been kinder than Mrs. Vesey's congratulations on Scourer's victory—a result which, though she cared little about such things herself (she was not in the way of hearing of them, you see), must, as she knew, give dear Miss Fanshawe so much pleasure.

The different events of the day were one after another decided, and at last the whole programme was concluded. A few minutes afterward Minna, looking nervously round, descried Lord Fitz-John, closely followed by Messrs. Denton and Clarkson, making his way through the gradually thinning crowd toward the carriages. His face was flushed, and his manner more excited than she had ever seen it before; evidently Scourer's performance was a great triumph to him.

"Well, you congratulate me, don't you?" he said, coming up with something of a swagger. "By George, I congratulate myself, I can tell you—I never had such a piece of luck in my life. Hurrah for Scourer—hey?"

"Hurrah for Scourer," repeated Mr. Denton.

"My sentiments to a T," assented Mr. Clarkson.

"I was very glad to hear that he had won," said Minna, forcing herself to speak. "I congratulate you very much."

"O yes! dear Lord Fitz-John, we both congratulate you most heartily," chimed in Mrs. Fanshawe, supplementing Minna's lack of warmth.

"I knew you'd be pleased, Min." Minna had never heard this abbreviation of her Christian name before, and thought that even the long-discarded Minnie would have been preferable. "I knew you'd be pleased. Better or worse, health or sickness, and all that style of thing, hey? By Jove, if I'd thought of it, I'd have drunk your health too. We've just been drinking Scourer's, you know—with all the honors, egad."

Minna shuddered; she had already had a suspicion of what might be one of the causes of her future husband's unwonted demonstrativeness, and this information confirmed it.

"And now I must be off again—nothing but partings here below, eh? We're being waited for all this time, but I thought I'd come and have a peep at you first—you wouldn't have been happy else, would you? Bye, bye."

"Going away again!" ejaculated Mrs. Fanshawe, looking quite disappointed. "Why, I thought it was understood that you were to come and dine with us at the Grand Stand Hotel."

"Very sorry, but you must do without me to-day. I'm engaged to dine with Denton and Clarkson at the Three Jolly Jockeys—the only house in the place for getting any thing decent to eat or drink, they say—and little Bob Flad is to look in upon us. But I'll come to you after dinner if you like, and take care of you home."

"Well, I suppose that must content us," said Mrs. Fanshawe regretfully. "You will come after dinner, then, and inquire for us at the Grand Stand Hotel?"

"You are going to dine at the Grand Stand Hotel!" put in Mrs. Vesey in a tone of rapture. "*My dear Mrs. Hodgetts, only think!*"

"Why, that's just what we are going to do ourselves," said Mrs. Hodgetts.

"Yes, just what we are going to do ourselves. So very fortunate, to be sure! We shall tell them to put us all together, shall we not, dear Mrs. Fanshawe?"

Minna's heart sank within her; was she never to be released from that woman?

"Good-bye, Minna, I'll be sure to look you up after dinner. Minna and dinner—egad, that's poetry, isn't it? Come along, old fellows, or they'll be doing the victuals brown at the Jolly Jockeys, and us too—ha! ha! Come along, and hurrah for Scourer."

"Hurrah for Scourer!" echoed the other two, and host and guests went off together.

"What wonderful spirits his lordship has!" said Mrs. Vesey, looking after them.

Minna colored, and was conscious of regarding Mrs. Vesey with the bitterest dislike.

The ladies, being thus left to their own devices, drove without delay to the Grand Stand Hotel, where, to the delight of friendly Mrs. Vesey, it was ascertained that the two parties could be accommodated in the same room without the smallest difficulty. Accordingly this was done, and the five ladies dined together in the most comfortable cosy style imaginable—so at least said Mrs. Vesey, who was never tired of enlarging on the fortunate chance which had led to so delightful a gathering of old friends.

The dinner came to an end, and Lord Fitz-John had not yet shown himself; but of course it was hardly to have been expected that he should—gentlemen always like to sit a little over their wine, as Mrs. Vesey said. So the ladies had tea, prolonged by a great deal of gossip about absent friends and acquaintances, before they thought of wondering why the lover did not make his appearance. By that time, however, it being almost dark, Mrs. Fanshawe began to consult her watch, and to remark that Lord Fitz-John was rather late.

"I declare I've a good mind to send to that place, the—whatever the name of it is—and let him know we are waiting for him," she said at last. "It's so very odd, and besides it is quite time for us to be going home now."

"Don't you think we had better go back by ourselves, mamma?" said Minna eagerly. "It seems a pity to delay any longer when it is so late."

"My dear Minna, I wonder how you can propose such a thing. Lord Fitz-John has said he will see us home, and the least we can do is to wait for him. I am quite surprised at you."

"I could not have believed Miss Fanshawe would be so sly," said Mrs. Vesey, looking at Minna with an air of playful reproof. "She wants to persuade us that somebody's company is no object to her—oh dear no! not the least in the world! But it is no good, my dear, we all know better than that."

It was ultimately decided that Mrs. Fanshawe's suggestion should be acted upon, and a waiter was accordingly despatched to the Three Jolly Jockeys with a message for Lord Fitz-John to the effect that the ladies were waiting.

"But you and Mrs. Hodgetts need not wait, you know," said Mrs. Fanshawe to her friends when this was done. "I should be so sorry for you to delay yourselves on our account. I do beg that you won't think of such a thing."

Possibly the same fear had just occurred to Mrs. Fanshawe which already oppressed Minna.

"My dear friend, you may be sure we shan't think of any thing else. What! leave you and dear Minna in this state of uneasiness regarding one who is so soon . . . I couldn't, positively I couldn't. Could you, Mrs. Hodgetts? could you, Arabella? No, no, here we stay until all suspense is at an end. How little you know me, to be sure!"

In vain the kind lady was assured by Mrs. Fanshawe and Minna that they were not under any uneasiness whatever; her friendly resolve was not to be shaken for an instant, and the whole party addressed themselves to the business of waiting for Lord Fitz-John.

They had waited some little time, when at last a sound was heard on the stair-case which made Mrs. Vesey put her finger on her lips and signal the others to silence. But Minna would have given any thing not to have heard, for the sound was one which struck upon her heart like a knell. It was that of a heavy footstep stumbling up stairs.

It paused outside the door, and Minna was in agony. Then another steadier footstep was heard following close behind, and immediately afterward the waiter who had been Mrs. Fanshawe's messenger opened the door and announced—

"Lord Fitz-John."

All eyes were turned on the doorway, Minna's attracted as by a kind of horrible fascination. A figure appeared which swayed from side to side in its gait, and seemed to have considerable difficulty in keeping itself upright. Lord Fitz-John was drunk.

If Minna had been able to form any wish at that moment, it would have been that the earth might open to swallow her up.

"Goodness! what's the matter?" cried Mrs. Vesey in a voice of poignant anxiety. "Has any body hurt his lordship? Is he ill?"

The patient heard the last words, and drew himself up with an ineffectual effort at steadiness.

"Ill! I'm not ill. Who says I'm ill? I'm not ill. I'm all right. Hurrah for Scourer!"

Mrs. Vesey's countenance became at once overcast with an air of heavenly pity. She saw only too well how it was. But even in the midst of her sympathy for others, she remembered that she had a duty to perform toward her own child—that gentle maiden who had been as tenderly guarded from the contact of vice or impurity as the petals of a still unfolded lily from premature exposure to the elements.

"Arabella, my dear, it is not right that you should stay here. Go into the room where we took off our things. I will come to you as soon as I can."

Arabella needed no second bidding. She cast a look of horror on Lord Fitz-John, who now stood in the middle of the room endeavoring to steady himself with an air of tipsy gravity, and fled from his presence like a frightened fawn. But though Minna was some years younger than Arabella, nobody thought of telling *her* to leave the room. For her the post of duty was by the side of the drunken man.

A silence as of death prevailed for some moments, broken at last by Mrs. Fanshawe asking

of the waiter, who still lingered at the door, perhaps in the expectation that his services might be required—

"Is my carriage ready?"

"Yes, ma'am, waiting outside now." He looked at Lord Fitz-John, and went on, a little hesitatingly — "We have got the gentleman's horse in the stables, ma'am — the same that brought him over in the morning. Shall I tell them to put the saddle on, or do you think . . ."

The waiter looked at the great man again, and became respectfully silent.

"What the devil is the fellow staring at?" asked his lordship, leaning against the table, and speaking rather thickly. "Yes, tell them to put the saddle on, and then I'll put myself on the saddle. 'Gad, I'll show them how to bring a horse's pace out.'"

Mrs. Fanshawe turned on the speaker a glance full of solicitude; she did not admire him just at present, but she felt that he was a great deal too precious to her to be allowed to risk his life and limbs.

"No, no, dear Lord Fitz-John; you must not think of riding now that it is so dark. There is my carriage quite at your service, and Minna and I shall be delighted to have your company. Come, you can't withstand that."

"Mamma, there is no room in the carriage," said Minna, speaking for the first time. "It is impossible, really impossible."

The bare idea of going home in the same carriage with that man filled her with loathing.

"Nonsense, Minna! you don't know what you are talking about. Indeed, Lord Fitz-John, she wishes it as much as I do."

"Mamma . . ."

At that moment Mrs. Vesey's hand was laid on her arm.

"My dear," said that lady in a low voice, "you will excuse the liberty I am taking, I know, but really in this matter you have no choice. Just look at him, and say how he is ever to get home on horseback without an accident. I tell you candidly, my dear, I never saw any one farther gone, though to be sure I have had very little experience in such things."

Minna made no answer; her face was burning with shame and anger.

"Well, Min, as you're so set on it, I don't mind if I oblige you," said her lover, yielding to the persuasions of Mrs. Fanshawe.

"Waiter, show his lordship to the carriage," said Mrs. Fanshawe, instantly pressing her advantage.

Whereupon Lord Fitz-John was taken possession of by the waiter and guided down stairs very carefully. Mrs. Fanshawe and Minna were obliged to stay behind a moment to take leave of their friends.

"Good-bye, Miss Fanshawe; I am very sorry this should have happened," said Mrs. Hodgetts, who had been looking on in mute, almost stunned, astonishment.

Mrs. Vesey was more effusive.

"Good-bye, dear Minna. If you only knew how I feel for you! But do not be alarmed about him, my love — not about his health, I mean. He will be quite himself again to-morrow, I have no doubt; use makes all the difference in such cases, you know."

Minna left the room without answering, and

glided quickly down stairs after Mrs. Fanshawe to the hotel door. Here they found Lord Fitz-John, who had paused to hold forth to the waiter on the merits of Scourer. On seeing the ladies prepare to enter their carriage, some remnant of chivalrousness awakened within him, and he insisted on helping to hand them in.

"Very dark and uncommon slippery; 'pon honor, you must allow me. By Jove, I don't know when it's been so slippery before—don't you find it so too, Min? Hollo! what's that for?"

He had been squeezing her hand, and she had torn it away from him with an angry impetuosity which even in the present foggy state of his faculties he could not avoid perceiving. But he forgot this little incident in the difficulty of getting himself into the carriage after the ladies, and was completely restored to self-complacency in another minute.

"I say, Min, the next time we're riding together like this, it will be coming back from church, you know."

Minna remained silent; she felt as though she were choking.

That journey to her in company with that man was nothing short of horrible. He was very hilarious at first, and was not fastidious in his hilarity, so that occasionally it even slightly shocked Mrs. Fanshawe, upon whom devolved all the onus of taking up and appreciating his good things. For Minna during the whole drive never spoke a word, muffling herself in her hood, and retreating as far as possible into her corner, as though afraid of letting him touch the hem of her garment. Even when, after a while, he gradually became silent, and fell into a heavy sleep interrupted only by an occasional snore, her shrinking from him scarcely diminished. At every jolt of the carriage a terrible fear seized her lest he should fall forward and brush against her dress, and at such times she would steal a glance at the reclining figure and hanging head dimly shown by the light of the carriage lamps, with a sensation of more genuine dread than she had ever known. All the way she was longing for the journey's end as she had never longed for any thing before. The very presence of the man oppressed and suffocated her.

He slept on without intermission till the carriage stopped before Mrs. Fanshawe's house; then, roused by the cessation of the motion, looked up suddenly and rubbed his eyes. At that instant the carriage door was opened by the footman; and, with a tipsy man's anxiety to prove that there is nothing the matter with him, he stumbled out, and turned round to help down the ladies. Minna was on the side nearest the door, and was obliged to alight first. But she would not touch Lord Fitz-John's outstretched hand, and, springing lightly to the ground, hastened past him into the house. Before she could be rejoined by Mrs. Fanshawe, who, more politely and charitably, stayed a few moments behind to bid his lordship good-night, and whisper her instructions as to his safe conveyance to Fitz-John Court, Minna had rushed up stairs to her bed-room and turned the key. The room was dark except for the moonlight that shone dimly through the drawn blind, but she did not mind that—she cared for nothing save to be alone with her own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXX.

REVOLT.

SHE threw herself on her knees by her bedside, and let her head fall forward on her clasped hands, in an attitude of deepest humiliation. And yet perhaps her chief feeling at that moment was not so much humiliation as hatred—yes, positive hatred—for the man whose wife she was in a few weeks to be. With what fervency of loathing she thought of his thick voice, his staggering gait, his beery breath, his tipsy amorousness, his coarseness, his vulgarity, his horses and his friends—of all and every thing that was his! Every half-formed sentiment of repulsion that had ever risen in her heart against Lord Fitz-John since she had known him, and which at the time she had thought to have strangled in its birth, came back upon her now, overflowing with long-repressed energy, and embittered by a present sense of intolerable wrong. She detested him, she abhorred him—no word was strong enough to express the intensity of her feelings. And to think that for him, that drunken clown who was called lord, she had rejected the lot of celestial happiness offered her by Raymond Lee—Raymond whom she had loved (it was no good to weigh words now), Raymond whose very upbraidings she would sooner listen to than to the wooing of an emperor—Raymond, the mere memory of whose love was her proudest and dearest possession.

Oh! fool, fool—wicked world-serving fool!

The veil had fallen from her eyes now, and she understood clearly what she had done, what hitherto she had been. She knew now that she had always disliked the man whom she had grown so suddenly to hate; that she had promised to become his wife simply and solely because his name bore a prefix that would make her an object of envy to a number of people who were really nothing to her. She had willfully shut her eyes to every thing about him except his title, and for that she had sold herself. Sold herself, Raymond had said; sold herself, a thousand inner voices repeated after him. In all its monstrous ugliness her sin stood disclosed to her, making her hate and despise herself almost as she hated and despised her betrothed husband. Alas! alas! what a contemptible self-degraded wretch she was—and not in her own eyes only, but in those of Raymond Lee. He who was himself so good, so noble, so lofty-souled and pure-hearted, how unspeakably base and despicable he must hold her!

And he had thought so well of her before, had had so little idea of her infinite unworthiness. He had hardly believed her even when she told him with her own lips how she had bargained herself away. He had sought excuses for her, had taken for granted that she was acting under the compulsion or persuasion of others, had done his best by wise counsel to save her until he found that she did not desire to be saved. She was being sacrificed to Mrs. Fanshawe's ambition, he had told her—her real mother would have cared for her better.

Her real mother! The words brought back the vision of a mild sweet face that long ago had watched by her bedside, the sounds of a soft caressing voice that had soothed her in childish pain and sorrow; and she knew that Raymond

had spoken truly. Ah yes! her real mother would have loved her too well to let her barter happiness in exchange for rank or any other worldly good; her real mother would have saved her—saved her from yonder man, saved her from herself. Oh! why had she not been suffered to remain under that mother's loving protection while she might? why had she not been suffered to grow up like Amy? Surely she had been hardly used in being sent out so early upon the world. Her father had been cruel—very cruel; he ought to have borne any amount of poverty rather than thrust her forth from her inheritance of maternal tenderness and home affection.

Her thoughts grew very bitter against poor John Haroldson just now. She remembered how unkind and unjust she had found him a few weeks ago; and it seemed to her that he could never have been any thing else. Suddenly she checked herself with a pang of remorseful anguish. An echo of the sick man's voice sounded in her ear, saying—

"And though I could have borne the poverty for myself, I couldn't for you, my darling. It was for your sake, Minnie dear, or I'd sooner have cut my right hand off."

For her sake—yes, of course it had been for her sake. She saw all, understood all now. How could she ever have misunderstood? It was she who had been unkind, she who had been unjust, to have judged him as she had, to have doubted love of which she had received so many proofs. Of course he loved her—the dear, dear father that he was—loved her as much as ever he had done in those childish wild-primrose days which he had made so pleasant to her. Had he not well-nigh wept with joy at seeing her come back to him—joy that was only turned to bitterness on finding that she was to leave him again? How could she have misinterpreted him so? And had she not been expressly told by Joe Pullyn that he was pining after her, that by going home to him she might be the comfort and blessing of his life? Oh! if only she had accepted the duty thus shown her—if only she had gone!

How happy she might have been! How she and her father—her own darling father—would have loved each other! What heavenly freedom she would have found in the sanded kitchen—that dear old place where she and Amy used to play together with their mother looking on! No drunken lover there, no sneering sympathizers, no oppressive mother-in-law—liberty and peace and bliss from morning to night. Why had she not gone when she might—why not? why not?

Because a rich home had seemed to her better than a poor one.

The unutterable folly of the choice, the unutterable flimsiness of the reason! Good heavens! what was this rich home of hers which she had elected to retain at such a cost—at the cost of freedom, happiness, and natural affection—what was it? A collection of soft chairs, damask hangings, gilt cornices—an apotheosis of upholstery. She raised her head from her hands and looked round. There they were, showing spectrally in the pale moonlight—the long stiff curtains hanging in irreproachable folds, the faultlessly elegant bedstead, the elaborately-

carved dressing-table, all the extremely superior articles of furniture by which she had hitherto deemed it so desirable to be surrounded—there they were in all their solemn decorum, preaching to her of the duty she owed to society and to appearances, and seeming to frown down the presumptuous dreams of joy and freedom suggested by the memory of the sanded kitchen. It was as though they said—"What would the respectable tradesman who supplied us, and who keeps nothing but first-class goods, think of the furniture at Black Moor Farm?" Yes, but at Black Moor Farm she could be happy, while here she was miserable, and at Fitz-John Court would be more miserable still.

An audacious question formed itself in her heart, making it beat wildly with hope and excitement. Why not be free even now? why not even now go to her father and ask him to take her back? That sale of herself on which she had learned to look with such abhorrence was not yet complete. The preliminaries were prepared, but the binding forms were still wanting. Logically she was as free as ever she had been—free to go and live with her father to-morrow if she chose. To-morrow! what ecstasy in the idea!

But no! she saw society shaking its grave head; she heard society with its many tongues thundering forth "Impossible." The wedding dress bought, and the bride change her mind! Was such a thing ever known? She could hear all the respectabilities in chorus telling her, "It is too late."

Still, would her dead mother, would her living father deem it too late? She did not think they would.

And what had society and its respectabilities ever done for her? On her side she had made for them sacrifices innumerable, of time, duty, and inclination; but what had they done for her, what would they do for her save demand farther sacrifices? She had been offering on the altar of those false gods all her life long, had made irretrievable immolation of the most precious thing that had ever been hers—the love of Raymond Lee; and now she was required to immolate herself. As she thus recapitulated her wrongs, her heart swelled as though it would burst with rebellious resentment against the masters she had so long served; and, pressing her face against the coverlet of the bed, she wept the bitterest tears she had ever known.

A few minutes passed thus, and then she lifted her head proudly, and, dashing the tears away, rose to her feet. Her face was very pale as she turned it toward the moonlight, but it wore an expression strangely calm and resolved—an expression quite unknown to any of her ball-room partners. It was the face of one who has fought a great fight and gained a great victory.

She went to the window, and, drawing aside the blind, looked out upon the night, as though seeking to fortify herself with some of nature's own tranquility. But she had not looked long when she was roused by a footstep approaching her door, the handle of which was impatiently shaken.

"It is me, my dear," said a voice which she instantly knew to be that of Mrs. Fanshawe. "Open the door, please."

Minna started, and went forward to unlock

the door, on which Mrs. Fanshawe entered the room breathlessly.

"Look, Minna dear, I have just come to show you . . . Why, child, what are you doing all in the dark? Light a candle directly; here is something that we have all been expecting just come home, and I want you to look at it."

Mechanically and half unconsciously Minna lit a candle in one of the chandeliers attached to her mirror, producing an illumination which made her cheeks look almost ashy in their pallor. But Mrs. Fanshawe was too much engrossed just now to be observant, and, holding up something to the light, exclaimed triumphantly—

"There, what do you think of that?"

It was a set of diamonds, which flashed and glittered out of the velvet-lined case in which they were imbedded, like drops of shining spray.

"A wedding present from your papa and me to Lady Fitz-John who is to be—not a shabby one, I flatter myself. Only see how they sparkle! On your white neck they will be superb!"

Minna raised her eyes dreamily and looked, but the diamonds, splendid as they were, did not dazzle her. Perhaps it was that she was still half blinded by the effect of recent tears.

As she looked, another scene—never till now recollected from the day on which it had taken place—rose before her mind's eye, and she remembered how the same hands which now held up the diamonds to her view had once exhibited a gay little dress, with a short skirt very widely distended and a profusion of rosebud trimmings. That said gay little dress had been the bait to tempt her away from home and freedom and duty and true happiness. This time the bait was made of more costly material, but she was older and wiser than she had been then.

"You may well look at them, Minna—I never saw any thing more magnificent in my life. Well, there they are, my pet; keep them, and wear them for the first time at your wedding."

But Minna shook her head, and answered in a low calm voice—

"Mamma, that wedding will never be. I can not marry Lord Fitz-John."

CHAPTER XXXI.

OPEN WAR.

MRS. FANSHAW'S eyes had been fastened admiringly on the diamonds, but they were turned instantly on Minna at these words.

"What is that you are saying?" she demanded sharply.

"I can not marry Lord Fitz-John," repeated Minna—faintly, but still steadily.

Mrs. Fanshawe heard, but apparently did not understand. She looked at Minna for a moment in silence, as though stupefied.

"Can not marry Lord Fitz-John! Minna, what in the name of Heaven are you talking about?"

Minna clasped her hands together, and fell weeping at Mrs. Fanshawe's feet.

"Mamma, mamma, do not be angry with me, but I can not—indeed I can not. He was drunk to-night, he is a bad man, and I hate him."

For some seconds Mrs. Fanshawe had no words

to answer; astonishment and dismay had taken away her breath. And then her very brain was stunned with the fearful imaginings that rushed through it of what would happen in the cataclysm pointed at by the declaration she had just heard—of what people would say, of how people would look, of how she would feel, of orders to be countermanded, of exquisitely-fitting dresses and coronet-embroidered handkerchiefs suddenly rendered useless, of jewelry and lace and bridal ornaments to be taken back by the tradesmen at a valuation. But no—such things could not be. They were too horrible to find a place among the possibilities of the universe. She wiped the cold perspiration from her brow, and told herself that she was safe. And yet there was the fact of that kneeling figure at her feet to be disposed of somehow.

"Minna," she at last said sternly, "this language applied to your affianced husband is nothing less than indecent. I can only excuse you by supposing that you are ill and hysterical, and unconscious of what you are saying; otherwise let me tell you that I should consider you very wicked. I don't speak of your ingratitude and undutifulness toward me, though how you can reconcile it to your feelings to throw me into this state of agitation is certainly more than I can understand. You don't know the harm it does me, or perhaps you would behave differently."

And in truth her nerves were in a very unwonted flutter.

"Oh! do forgive me! do forgive me! dear, dear mamma!" exclaimed Minna, seizing her hand and covering it with kisses. "But I can not marry that man—I can not. It is not that I am ungrateful—oh no, no! for I love you very, very much, and always shall. No niece could have had a dearer, kinder aunt than you have been, I feel that over and over again. Whatever I am, I am not ungrateful."

Mrs. Fanshawe drew her hand coldly away. This was the first time that the words aunt and niece had been pronounced between them for years, and they grated harshly on her ear.

"You may be sure that you will never be any thing more than a niece to me again if you persist in holding such language. Minna, get up, and let there be no more of this tragedy nonsense."

Minna rose slowly to her feet, trying to choke down her sobs.

"Forgive me!" she said in a stifled voice.

"Perhaps I shall when I know what you mean by your extraordinary caprice, but certainly not before. What am I to understand by your allusions just now to Lord Fitz-John? Speak calmly, if you please; you have agitated me quite sufficiently already. What have you to say about him?"

"He is not a good man, mamma; he gambles, and drinks, and keeps bad company. He is vulgar and coarse and dissipated, and—and I can not endure him," she concluded, with a passionate burst which she could not repress.

"Be good enough to be a little more ladylike," said Mrs. Fanshawe, with icy politeness. "Well, and supposing he were all that you say, it is your part, standing in such a relation to him as you do, to make the least and not the most of his faults. I should like to know what young man of his age is not a little wild sometimes. And

then his rank too—so exposed to temptation—he is not to be judged by common rules."

No indeed—it was not in Mrs. Fanshawe's nature to judge a peer who was willing to be her son-in-law by common rules.

"Besides, you have found out nothing about him that you did not perfectly well know before you engaged yourself to him. You have no business to complain; people said he had his faults, and you knew that they said so. Let me tell you, they will be entitled to say much worse things of you if you play fast and loose with your word in this style."

This was hitting the weak point of Minna's case, and Minna felt that it was so. Yes, undeniably she had made her bargain deliberately and with her eyes open.

"I shall deserve all that they will say, mamma, and I know it. I have acted weakly and wickedly—I have been a worldly self-seeking wretch. (It was surprising how completely she had come to accept the fitness of these two unpleasant adjectives.) But now that I see my fault, I should be more wicked in keeping my word than in breaking it. So that I escape marrying a man that I hate, I do not care what people say of me."

"Nor of me either, I suppose," and Mrs. Fanshawe suddenly turned scarlet with passion. "You don't care how you disgrace me—oh no! of course not. But perhaps I care—perhaps I care."

She stamped violently as she spoke, the caressing maternal character she had so long kept up quite lost in the angry ebullition of mortified self-love. But then the affection of Mrs. Fanshawe for Minna had always differed from the affection of a real mother. In place of being the most unselfish sentiment of which the human heart is capable, it was but an unconscious form of vanity and egotism; and it was natural that when these were wounded through her adopted child, her love should turn to bitterness. The spectacle of Minna's grief, the chances of Minna's future happiness or unhappiness, were as nothing to her in view of the humiliation of having to tell her friends and acquaintances that her daughter was not going to marry a lord after all.

"It can be no disgrace to you, dear mamma," said Minna trembling. "The disgrace will be mine, all mine."

"Yours, yes, it shall be yours, I promise you that, my young lady." Whatever there is of inherent vulgarity in a character is sure to assert itself in moments of anger. "Every body shall know that I have been no party to any thing so shameful, you may be quite sure. It would be rather better perhaps if you could undertake that the expense will be yours too. What do you say to your dresses and fine clothes, and your Honiton-lace veil, and your velvet at a guinea a yard, and these very diamonds here that you have thrown back in my face, and the lawyers' bill for drawing up the settlements? Lawyers indeed! it's I who ought to be paid for that; the lawyers wouldn't have argued with Fanshawe night and day as I have done to keep him up to the point. And you would leave me in the lurch looking like a fool after all this, would you? If I thought you really meant it, I should say that the unluckiest day of my life was the day I first set eyes on you."

"Mamma!" pleaded Minna.

"Don't call me mamma—you are not my

daughter if you are to make me ashamed of you. It shall not be said a child of mine has been jilted, and that is what they will say of you, take my word for it. If you think yourself too good to marry the man you are engaged to, you may go back and live with your own family, if they will have you; you shall no longer stay in mine."

She could hardly doubt that this terrible threat would bring Minna to her senses, and stole a glance at her to see the effect. But Minna, though pale and trembling, showed no signs of yielding.

"It will be right that I should go back, of course it is what I intend doing. I ought to have gone long ago; I have neglected my father shamefully—my poor dear father—but I am punished for it."

Mrs. Fanshawe could scarcely believe her ears. She paused a moment in sheer astonishment, soon, however, absorbed in the stronger feeling of indignation.

"Oh indeed! your poor dear father, do you say? You seem to have got wonderfully fond of him all of a sudden. A nice father, certainly, who parted with you because he saw his way to a good bargain!"

Minna had hitherto listened to all her aunt's reproaches humbly and submissively, accepting them as part of a merited punishment. But this taunt cast at John Haroldson struck a chord too sensitive to be touched with impunity, and she became suddenly defiant.

"It is false!" she exclaimed with flashing eyes. "Whatever he did was done for my sake, and not for his own; and if I had had a heart, I should have known it long ago. He is the best and kindest father that ever lived, and you must not say such things of him."

By this time Mrs. Fanshawe was almost choking with rage.

"Must not! must not! Is that how you speak to me? Yes, you may well be fond of him—you are his own daughter, every inch of you—insolent, ungrateful girl! Go back to your father by all means—your obstinate, impertinent clod-hopper of a father, whom your mother disgraced herself by marrying."

"Aunt!" remonstrated Minna, and her voice was so imperious as absolutely to startle the hearer into momentary silence. Mrs. Fanshawe was quite taken by surprise, perhaps as much by the word as by the tone in which it was uttered.

"Oh! is that to be the way of it? I am not to be allowed to speak in my own house, I suppose. Certainly, niece Minna, it is high time that you should look out for another home."

"I intend to return to my own home to-morrow."

"Very well. And I hope you will understand that I intend on my side that when you once leave this house you are never to look me in the face again."

She moved toward the door as she spoke (not forgetting to take the diamonds with her). Minna had looked and felt very stern an instant before, but—such is the force of habit and long association—when she saw her aunt on the point of leaving her in anger, her heart suddenly softened.

"Aunt, dear aunt"—even the force of habit and long association could not induce her to say "mamma" to the woman who had just insulted

her father—"will you not forgive me? I ask no farther favor from you. I am content to give up every thing that till now you have let me call mine, but I can not bear to feel that you are angry. Do not hate me, aunt; try to think kindly of me."

It was not every one who could have resisted the appeal of the pale tear-stained face, the mournful eyes, and the supplicating voice; but the disappointed benefactress was inexorable. Her hand was already on the door, and she did not withdraw it, but merely looked round to say coldly—

"Minna Haroldson, you have the night before you to reflect. If you come to me to-morrow morning to apologize for your past conduct, and to say that you are willing to fulfill your engagement to your affianced husband, all shall be forgiven and forgotten. If not, you know the consequences—you go home, and we are henceforth strangers."

In another moment she had left the room.

"Then it must be so," said Minna sadly to herself. "For come what will, I go home to-morrow."

Home! what magic in the word! what promise of liberty! what healing charm! She seemed to breathe more lightly as she repeated it. So she was really going to be free; so she had really done forever with that man! An immense load was lifted from her heart. She was going to a sanctuary whither no heavy-eyed, heavy-jawed lover, no freezing dowager, no insipid morning-caller, no fashionable milliner or dress-maker would dare to follow; her father and Amy would give her protection against them all—more especially against the lover. She shuddered as she thought of him. But he belonged to the past, to that dark past with which she had broken forever; let him be forgotten with its other shadows. The future was before her, and in the future her father and Amy, the sanded kitchen, the wild primroses—home love, home peace, home happiness. And that future was to begin to-morrow! How she longed for the morrow to come! Even the probability of perpetual estrangement from the aunt whom she had so long called mother scarcely marred the pleasure of the prospect, for had not her pseudo-mother spoken unpardonable words of her real mother and her father?

Not that she thought to carry no regrets with her from the past into the future. One memory there was which she felt must always cleave to her, blending sweet and bitter strangely together in her heart. That she had once been deemed deserving of Raymond Lee's love would be forever her highest honor; that by her unworthiness she had irrevocably forfeited it would forever remain her heaviest punishment. Irrevocably forfeited she could not doubt that it was. He was too grand, too lofty, too severe in his contempt for worldliness, to give her a second thought; and then she was going where he would never hear of her more. But he had helped her to her liberty by those blessed words which in her folly she had so hotly resented at the time; he had done her good even in the act of forswearing her; it was by his means that to-day she was free. It was pleasant to know that—pleasant to feel grateful to him, as it ever must be pleasant to feel grateful to those we love.

Before Minna slept that night there were two letters lying folded and sealed on her dressing-table, ready to be posted the first thing next morning. One of them was a note of dismissal to Lord Fitz-John, the other a note of apology to Joe Pullyn.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RUNNING SMOOTH.

It was early in the afternoon of the following day, and Raymond Lee was sitting alone over his books in the little office-parlor where he had first seen Minna—plodding at his task with the stolid dreary energy of one who labors for the sake of labor, having no reward to expect from it save the present distraction which it brings.

He had always been given to work diligently, but never in his life had he worked half so diligently as within the last few weeks. For until the last few weeks he had never known what it was to dread leisure; and he did dread it now. His past and his present were divided from each other by a bright dream which, after flooding his existence with a radiance of hitherto unsuspected light and color, had suddenly vanished and left him, not as he was before, but with a hoard of bitter-sweet recollections that made memory a pain, and with a newly-acquired faculty of appreciating to its full extent the barrenness and desolation of his lot. Not only was he alone among his fellow-creatures, but he had discovered that he could never be otherwise than alone. Any latent element of hope that there might have been in his life formerly was crushed out of it now. He had made experiment of the world, and found that it was not for him; that it was colder, fulser, more sordid than he had deemed in his most cynical moods; that the fairest and brightest it had to show was tainted at the core. If Minna was a delusion, every thing that looked fair and bright must be a delusion too. Evidently there was no comfort but in oblivion, and for Raymond the nearest approach to oblivion was to be found in hard work.

On this particular afternoon he was so engrossed in his occupation of balancing his books that not only was he unconscious of the soft breeze that played pleasantly on his face through the open window, and the stray sunbeam that quivered upon the arm-chair which had once held Minna, but even a tap at his door failed to rouse him. At last, when it had been once or twice repeated to no purpose, the door was opened, and one of his clerks entered to say—

"If you please, sir, here's a gentleman of the name of Mr. Pullyn who wants very particularly to see you."

And behind the clerk's head appeared the rudely physiognomy of Joe.

"Only for a few minutes, Mr. Lee; I won't detain you more than a few minutes."

Abstract sentiments of misanthropy notwithstanding, Raymond had preserved his kindness for his old school-fellow undiminished, and immediately on recognizing him rose with extended hand to give him welcome.

"So it is you, Joe—who would have thought of it? Come in, pray. All well with you, I hope?"

Joe glanced at the clerk, who was in the act of

retreating, and did not answer, but shook Raymond's hand with a warmth which, however pleasing as a proof of friendship, was, physically speaking, rather overpowering. Raymond was quite surprised, for Joe was usually too shy to be demonstrative.

"Why, Joe, what's the matter? And these your business hours too! Any thing gone wrong?"

Joe looked round, and, finding that the clerk had disappeared, suddenly exploded into speech.

"Gone wrong! No, Mr. Lee, thank goodness, nothing's gone wrong. What I've come to tell you is something quite different. Every thing's gone right—that's where it is—every thing's gone right."

Joe's hat went up frantically to the ceiling, descending to be caught triumphantly in its owner's arms.

"Yes, that's where it is—every thing's gone right. And I knew you'd be pleased to hear it, and I knew I couldn't make better use of the dinner hour than to come and tell you; for as for eating, bless you, why, it would choke me instead of doing me good. Yes, Mr. Lee, you may well stare, but it's quite true; every thing's gone right. I may marry Amy as soon as I like, and take her wherever they want to send us, for Mr. Haroldson is going to have his other daughter come to take care of him. His other daughter—God bless her! she's the best, kindest, noblest creature in the world—next I mean to my own little darling."

And Joe dandled his hat in a paroxysm of delight.

"His other daughter?" said Raymond hoarsely.

"For God's sake, tell me what you mean."

If Joe's excitement had not rendered him hopelessly unobservant, he would have seen that his friend had suddenly become pale as death.

"Yes, Mr. Lee, his other daughter. A regular brick she is if ever there was one, and I was a brute beast for ever breathing a word against her. What do you think of her writing to me to say . . . I ought to have the letter somewhere here; you shall see it if I can get hold of it."

He commenced a tedious process of fumbling in his pockets, while Raymond stood by fuming with impatience.

"I can't have left it behind surely—ah! perhaps it's in this one. The feelings it gave me, Mr. Lee, are not to be described. I was drawing up an invoice at the time, and when I came to read it over, I found I'd spelt carriage-paid with an *m* instead of a *c*. Bless you, the only wonder is I was able to write at all, with my hand all of a shake, and my head feeling as if a merry-go-round was at work inside it. It's a good thing the dinner hour was so near, or else there would have been a mistake in the books as sure as I'm a sinner. Ah! here it is—I knew I had got it somewhere or other. There, read that, Mr. Lee, and say if she isn't an angel that wrote it."

He held out a little note which Raymond, almost snatching at it in his impatience, tore open and glanced through with breathless eagerness. The contents were as follows:—

"LAUREL HOUSE, GROVE ROAD,
"August 15th, Midnight.

"DEAR MR. PULLYN:—Remembering what I once wrote to you, I fear you will not be dis-

posed to look on any request of mine with favor, yet perhaps for my sister's sake you will grant that which I am now about to make. It is that you will forgive me for rudeness the recollection of which now causes me great pain and self-reproach. I understand at last how good was the counsel you sought to give me, and I thank you for it most gratefully, especially as I believe it to have been one of the means of saving me from a great fault and a great misfortune. After this, I need scarcely say that I have determined to follow your advice, and to return to my dear father at once, having broken off the engagement of which you have probably heard, and which I am sure would not have made me happy. So, dear Mr. Pullyn, I trust it will not be long now before we are brother and sister-in-law, for Amy may be assured that our father shall not want for a nurse and companion while I live. But I shall tell her this myself before you can; tomorrow I shall be at home again. How happy it makes me to think of it! and I have been so unhappy lately! I have indeed a great deal to thank you for, and I do thank you with all my heart. Good-bye, and, hoping to see you very soon at my father's house, I remain, yours most sincerely and gratefully,

"MINNA HAROLDSON.

"P.S.—You must consider this note, and not the former one, as my real answer to your kind letter. Forget the other altogether, please. I am changed in name and every thing else since I wrote it."

There was wild tumult in Raymond's head and heart as he read these words—so wild that for a time he hardly knew what he did, what he thought, or even what he felt. But he knew that a mighty revolution had taken place which, as if by the touch of an enchanter's wand, had made all things and creatures lovely and lovable. Beauty had once more become beautiful; goodness was once more good. Minna was Minna after all.

"Well, have you finished?" demanded Joe, when he thought a reasonable time had elapsed. "What do you think of it? Was there ever such a letter? Was there ever such a girl?—except Amy, of course. Wasn't I speaking truth when I said every thing had gone right? Do you see what she says about brother and sister-in-law? Ain't she a trump now, ain't she? Hurrah! (Up went the hat again, with a furious bump against the ceiling.) You'll excuse me, Mr. Lee, but I'm so uncommon glad that really I can't help it. If you only felt what it was . . . Though of course I know you are glad too; you are too friendly not too be."

"Yes, I am very glad," said Raymond, handing back Minna's note.

He dared not trust himself to say more. Glad! yes, indeed he was glad—feverishly, deliriously glad. But he commanded himself, and Joe never guessed what fullness of joy was throbbing under that calm exterior.

"I was sure you would be, Mr. Lee. Bless me, there goes the three quarters past one, and I've got to be at my desk again by two. Good-bye, I shall have a run for it, but I don't mind that; it will let off some of the spare steam."

With these words and a great grasp of his friend's

hand, Joe made an abrupt exit, and Raymond found himself alone.

So Minna had broken loose from the entanglements of wealth and rank and social opinion, and was free—free not only from Lord Fitz-John, but from the influences which had made the Fitz-John engagement possible—free as she had never been since childhood. Raymond had accused her of weakness and worse than weakness in yielding to the temptations of the world, but now he was ready to accept her resistance of them as proof of preternatural heroism and strength. And this was the creature whom he had charged—and not in thought only, but in words spoken face to face—with being worldly and self-seeking! How infamously unjust he had been! how brutally rough-spoken! What could she think of him? Was it possible that she could ever forgive him? And yet must she not have forgiven him already, since she had done what he had so harshly told her that she ought to do? Surely if she had listened to the counsels he had spoken so churlishly when he had seen her last, she would listen to the love he would plead so tenderly when he should see her next.

When he should see her next! He began to calculate with vehement impatience how many hours of waiting must be passed first; he longed for a sight of her as a starving man for food. He would go over to her father's house to-morrow and demand an interview. To-morrow—why to-morrow? why not that same evening? No, hardly that evening—such precipitation might prejudice him in Mr. Haroldson's opinion. The father would not like the intrusion of a stranger during the first few hours of her return; and though her letter had been written last night, she was not to leave St. Austin's till to-day—perhaps she had scarcely left it yet.

As he came to this point, a potentiality occurred to him which seemed to set his blood on fire. If she had not yet left St. Austin's, it might be possible for him to see her before she went, to overtake her in the act of departing, and—if she were alone, as she probably would be, for his knowledge of Mrs. Fanshawe suggested that there must have been a quarrel—to plead his cause and know his fate at once. No sooner had the idea entered his head than it was acted upon, and in another instant he was on his way to the railway station.

Raymond's chance guess had not deceived him. Minna had not yet left St. Austin's. As he was on the point of entering the station, a showy carriage with a pair of curvetting horses drew up noisily at a few paces' distance. He looked round, and, between the heads of a group of intervening by-standers, descried a pale face at the carriage window which made his heart leap and his brain reel. It was Minna's face—that face which till within an hour ago he had hoped never to see again.

He fell a few steps back and watched. The footman sprang down and threw open the carriage door, a slight figure descended to the pavement, and the door was instantly shut again. It appeared that Raymond's most ardent desire was destined to be gratified; evidently she was alone. In a moment more she had entered the station, and Raymond was following a little way behind. Yes, she was alone, save indeed for the

attendance of a servant who carried the sn. traveling-bag apparently constituting all her luggage, and in whose manner—so at least thought Raymond—a slight shade of superciliousness was discernible. Did the man suspect that he was paying allegiance in a quarter where it was no longer due?

Probably the man did suspect something of the sort. There had been a stormy scene between aunt and niece that morning on the discovery that Minna still adhered to the rebellious intentions announced the previous evening. So, when orders were given to get the carriage ready to convey her to the railway station—thus much Mrs. Fanshawe conceded to appearances—it is not likely that any member of the establishment was taken by surprise. And then Minna's white face and subdued bearing furnished in themselves sufficient evidence that something unusually serious had happened. For her final parting from the home of her youth, and from the aunt whom she had so long accepted as a mother, had not been achieved without a violent wrench; nor indeed would it have been natural that it should.

Yet, pale as were her lips, they had never been compressed with an air of such resolution as they were now when she found herself on the point of commencing her homeward journey; and in spite of the sadness which was visible in her demeanor, there was in her heart a secret sense of triumph that unconsciously to herself supported her. Above all, she had no misgiving of error in what she was about to do.

The servant had gone to take out her ticket, and she was left standing on the platform, feeling very lonely and desolate, and longing for the shelter of her father's roof. She was at first quite composed, but suddenly a strange thrill rushed through her veins, and she felt her heart beat tumultuously. A voice she recognized had sounded close behind her, saying—

"Minna!"

She thought she was dreaming. Nobody whom she knew could possibly be there, and Raymond Lee least of all. She turned her head expecting to convince herself of her mistake. Great Heaven! her eyes met Raymond Lee's looking full into her face! And she knew now that she was not dreaming; no dream could have pictured the expression of those eyes so vividly.

He put out his hand to take hers, which was yielded at once.

"Minna!" he repeated. The syllables rose so familiarly to his lips that he hardly noticed he was calling her by her Christian name. Minna, however, did notice it, and rejoiced from her inmost heart. She knew that she had received a full pardon.

But how had it come about? the question perplexed her even in the midst of her joy. She was happy, yet her happiness was an enigma.

She was frankly and freely forgiven, there was no doubt of that. Raymond had taken possession of her, and she felt that he had done so. He sent away the man who was returning with the ticket, and told him that there was no need to wait, for he himself would see the young lady safely off. And then he drew her arm through his, and they slowly paced the platform together, unheeding the by-standers, who for that matter, each having his or her own business

to attend to, were equally heedless of them. But indeed just then Raymond and Minna were not to be disconcerted by any amount of observation which could have been directed on them. The scene might have been shifted from a railway platform into a realm of fairy-land, and they would hardly have been conscious of the difference—already was their content so measureless. And yet, save that twice spoken name of Minna, no word had hitherto been uttered between them.

At last Raymond broke a silence which had certainly not been inexpressive.

"I have just seen your letter to Joe Pullyn," he whispered.

Minna was still mute; she could not speak for sheer amazement. Raymond see her letter to Joe Pullyn! how was that possible?

"Yes, Joe and I are old friends. And, Minna, I may tell you the whole truth now—I saw your former letter too. It is my only excuse for behaving as I did that miserable night of the ball. It made me think I had no chance, and I got desperate. Forgive me for that and every thing else, if you can. When last I saw you I acted like a savage. But I was half mad at the time."

"You said nothing but what was true," murmured Minna tremulously. "Oh! often and often since that day I have felt that it was all true."

"You have thought of me then? And what I said has really weighed something with you?"

"It was all true," she repeated evasively, trembling more than ever.

He came to a sudden halt, and, looking earnestly into her face, asked her—

"Minna, now that you are free again, will you be my wife?"

She could not answer at first, and he only felt her arm shaking convulsively within his. At length she was relieved by the tears springing to her eyes—tears as much of joy as of repentance—and she faltered—

"I do not deserve it—I have been so wicked."

"Hush, hush, you shall not say such things, my Minna. My Minna, for you are mine, are you not? Tell me, tell me—and let me know at once whether I am to be happy or miserable."

"I can not bear that you should be miserable," she whispered, half archly, half tearfully, while a deep blush spread itself over her face. "But I have not deserved it, I have not deserved it."

"My Minna! You promise me then that I shall be happy?"

She hung her head, and answered almost inaudibly—

"I will try very hard that you shall be."

"Minna! my darling! my beloved! my wife!"

He strained her hand to his heart, and for a moment every thing was forgotten by them in the intoxication of their mutually avowed love. Suddenly Raymond felt the hand he held struggle to release itself.

"My own dearest, what is it? Why. . . ."

"I had forgotten. I have promised to stay with my father, and I can not break my word. Forgive me, but you know that my first duty is to him, and you will not stand in the way of my doing what is right, I am sure. No, no, we must

not think of it any more—I felt at the time I did not deserve it."

"Darling, is that all? No, I will not stand in the way of your doing what is right—I will try to assist you rather. Your father shall live with us; we will help each other to take care of him; will not that do? That is, if he will let me—and he will let me, surely," Raymond added with a tinge of anxiety in his tones as he remembered Mr. Haroldson's reputation for eccentricity.

"Raymond! kind—noble—generous! Oh yes! people think my father eccentric, but I know that he would do any thing to—to. . . ." she paused and blushed up to the very roots of her hair—"to make me happy," she concluded in a whisper.

"My own love! My Minna!"

Again he took possession of her hand, and this time he was allowed to keep it. Perhaps it was because she had not strength to resist, for her tears were flowing very fast under her lowered veil. What had she done that she should be so blest?

The interview had only occupied a few minutes, but in those few minutes such a world of mute eloquence had been compressed that both Raymond and Minna could have believed it to have lasted hours. And yet, unreasonable as they were, they were taken most unpleasantly by surprise when the coming up of the train for Hollsworth, a moment after this final plighting of their troth, gave the signal of parting. It appeared to each that a whole lifetime might have been advantageously spent in pacing that bustling draughty railway platform arm-in-arm. Nevertheless they both had more or less of the artistic element in their composition, and under ordinary circumstances were not devoid of a sense of poetical fitness.

But even in their parting there was comfort, for they could look forward to other meetings in the almost immediate future. "Good-bye, my own," were Raymond's last words whispered hastily through the carriage window—"I will give you one day to spend undisturbed at home, but before to-morrow night your father shall have heard from me. And then, darling, then. . . ."

At that moment the train began to move, and Minna heard no more, but for some seconds still she saw his eyes following her with an expression of ineffable tenderness, and read in them the promise of an assured future of happiness which was to date from to-morrow evening. And long after she had lost sight of him, her own eyes were glistening with joy and thankfulness that rose straight from a full heart. What was she that she should be forgiven and once more chosen from all the world by such a man as that—the best and noblest of beings? What was she that, fresh from such errors as hers had been, she should thus, without previous expiation, be called to bliss so pure and perfect as now certainly awaited her?

Poor Minna!

She knew, as Raymond did, that her father was eccentric; but neither she nor Raymond knew what was the occasion of his eccentricity, or on what point it was most sensitive.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NO BIGGER THAN A MAN'S HAND.

RAYMOND came away from that hallowed railway platform in a dream of ecstasy.

His way back to his office lay through busy thoroughfares where wagons were rumbling and carts rattling and the pavement swarming with foot-passengers, but he saw and heard nothing save Minna—her tearful blushing face, her subdued happy voice. Not all the triteness and commonplace of the things that he might have seen and heard if he had chosen—the jostling and pushing, the incongruous encounters of donkey-carts and ponderous drays, the interchange of chaff between the drivers, the announcements of fearful sacrifices in shop windows, the larking of small boys—had power to mar one iota of the poetry which love and happiness had made in his heart, any more indeed than the sunshine and clear blue sky overhead had power to add to it. That fullness of joy which can resist all vulgarizing influences from without is complete in itself, and can borrow no new brightness or melody even from the light and music of nature.

So it was with Raymond now. He was dwelling on the memory of what had passed in that rapturous ten minutes' courtship; he was deifying Minna for her heroic renunciation of rank and riches, and adoring at her shrine; he was weaving visions of future and, as it seemed, assured happiness; and all else was necessarily a blank to him.

It would probably have been very long ere he had spontaneously awakened from so absorbing a reverie; but about the middle of his walk he was violently roused into consciousness of the outer world by finding a delicately-gloved lady's hand suddenly extended for his acceptance, and hearing a female voice somewhere in his immediate neighborhood exclaim—

"Mr. Lee! Positively Mr. Lee!"

He started, and gradually became aware that he had before him his old enemy Mrs. Vesey. She had just come out of a fashionable silk-mercier's shop, and he had unwittingly walked straight up to her. But though by an effort of memory and observation he managed to make out thus much, and even was able to summon sufficient presence of mind to do all that politeness absolutely required, he was still very far up in the clouds.

"I was almost afraid you had forgotten me, Mr. Lee; you would have passed me if I had not literally forced myself upon you. And where have you been hiding all this time? it is a perfect age since you have been seen or heard of. But you perceive that though you have forgotten your friends, your friends have not quite forgotten you. Any day that you happen to be passing near my house, Mr. Lee, I should be so delighted if you would look in. We don't keep much company; neither Arabella nor myself can stand it; but to see a friend in a friendly way—a really friendly way, you know—is our greatest pleasure. Those unmeaning, overgrown balls and dinner-parties—oh dear! dear! Well, all I know is, I never could understand what there is to enjoy in them."

The emphasis on the personal pronoun bore latent reference to Mrs. Fanshawe and Minna. Mrs. Vesey knew that Raymond had for some time been estranged from them, and thought that

she could not possibly do better than give him to understand that she and Arabella were of an entirely different stamp. But Raymond had not even been listening to her.

She was encouraged by finding that he had heard her overtures without seeking to excuse himself, and resumed in her most cordial tones—

"We shall quite expect a call from you then, Mr. Lee. Or perhaps if you could manage to drop in some evening at tea-time . . . No ceremony, you know, only a cup of tea and a little pleasant chat. By the way, this is dreadful news, is it not? You have heard of course?"

"What news?" asked Raymond absently.

"Why, about Miss Fanshawe, you know—" Raymond became suddenly attentive. "What! is it possible you have not heard? and yet so many people are talking about it. Lord Fitz-John has given her up—is it not shocking?"

Raymond was not able to repress a start at being confronted with so undreamed-of an hypothesis. The bare possibility of such a thing as Lord Fitz-John's giving up Minna had never entered his brain, and for a moment the suggestion overwhelmed him by the sheer force of its unexpectedness. But immediately afterward he remembered how he had that morning seen it written in Minna's own hand that she had broken off an engagement which she knew could not make her happy; and he breathed freely again, listening to Mrs. Vesey in a temper compounded of intense scorn for the individual scandal-monger and amused philosophical curiosity in the genus. He wanted to see how far impudence and ingenuity could go in making plain facts look precisely the reverse of what they were.

"Poor dear girl—only fancy what a cruel mortification! Why, she will never be able to hold up her head again, one would think. Well, I shall never say but what Lord Fitz-John has used her infamously. He never cared for her much, I am afraid; indeed I have just had it from a friend who has been at Fitz-John Park this morning, that Lady Fitz-John always expected him to get tired of her. But for all that, a promise is a promise, and ought to be respected as such. Even if she did go a little too far in the way of encouraging him, poor thing—and I won't deny that I should be sorry to see a daughter of mine practice such transparent devices for entangling a young man—still he ought to have had more consideration for the girl he had once promised to marry. Such a frightful humiliation for her, you know. And I believe the letter he wrote giving her up was something perfectly brutal. In a lower rank of life there would be an action, but he considers himself safe against that of course—oh! altogether it is a most cowardly proceeding. I can hardly contain my indignation when I think of it. To blight a poor girl's prospects in that manner! They say she went into hysterics when she heard of it, and no wonder. Why, the trousseau is all bought, and every thing to my own knowledge ordered, down to the very cake. It is perfectly awful. The poor dear Fanshawes! I am so longing to see them; they must be in sad suffering, I am sure. So much for ambition, you see. Ah! I am very, very much grieved."

She paused for a moment to take breath, almost exhausted by the rapid, not to say lively, flow of her lamentations. By this time Raymond

had heard quite enough of her, and seized the opportunity of bringing the interview to a close.

"Mrs. Vesey, after this, it is necessary for me to tell you that in every thing you have just said you are entirely mistaken. Good-afternoon."

He raised his hat and passed on, leaving Mrs. Vesey absolutely transfixed with angry amazement.

"Decidedly the man is mad," she thought to herself as soon as she had sufficiently recovered to think at all; and she found much comfort in the theory.

In the meanwhile Raymond walked on, full of the most profound disgust for the ways of the world in general, and for Mrs. Vesey's ways in particular.

"Was that real life or a scene out of the 'School for Scandal?' But they are much the same, I fancy; much the same—fashionable real life at least. And those are the kind of people who are called friends, are they? That is to say, people who know just enough of you to feel an interest in murdering your character and taking away the happiness of those who believe in you. Why, supposing it possible that I could have been deceived by the slander she invented or repeated just now, what could I have thought . . ."

His brow darkened for a moment; then, recovering himself, he went on with his meditations thus—

"But I won't suppose it possible, it is too horrible to imagine what I should have thought. My own darling! I owe her an apology for listening to the woman's talk as long as I did. Still it is worth while to see how they do these things. A very finely developed lie, certainly, considering it can not be more than a few hours old—a most promising young lie. I wonder what size it will have reached to-morrow. It will get plenty of careful nursing and tender caressing at all events; every old woman in St. Austin's will give it a dandle. Well, let them say what they like—it can only amuse us. Minna renounces Lord Fitz-John—I have the passage in her letter by heart—and she gets the credit of being renounced by him. Very good indeed—intensely natural and characteristic. It was not considered possible that she should voluntarily give up a lord."

His lip curled with contempt and indignation, yet less with indignation than contempt. For as he told himself, it was no good to be angry about a slander which in another day he would forget that he had ever heard.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FATTED CALF.

AND now Minna was settled at home—in that old real home from which she had so long been an exile—and was as happy as a bird escaped from a gilded cage into its native woods.

She had glided up the little garden in the golden glow of the afternoon sunshine, and, finding her own way into the kitchen where her father sat brooding in his accustomed arm-chair, had fallen kneeling at his feet.

"Dear father, can you forgive me? I have come to stay with you always if you will let me."

No more words than these had been necessary

to open all the frozen-up fountains of John Har- oldson's tenderness. Even surprise at her unexpected appearance was swept away in the rising tide of joy which in one moment had inundated his spirit; and, with a little pause or hesitation as though he had been waiting for her coming all day, he put his arms round her and folded her to his heart.

"Minnie, my Minnie — my little darling child."

Thus had she been installed in her old place by her father's fireside and in her father's love.

That humble home was like a heaven to her. She felt herself so free there, so safe, above all so well loved. Her father seemed to worship the very ground she stood upon; she found his eyes constantly following her with a look of intense yearning affection that made her understand what a miserable imitation of parental love it was with which she had hitherto been content. Nor did Amy grudge her any of this long hoarded and suddenly poured forth tenderness. Amy herself joined in the welcome too heartily to be jealous, and vied with her father in affectionate, almost adoring, homage to the new-comer. And this conduct on Amy's part was not prompted merely by satisfaction at finding herself set free to marry Joe. She loved Minna for Minna's own sake, and would have loved her just the same if there had been no such person as Joe in the world. Not that it must be supposed that so tender-hearted a little thing remained coldly apathetic in the prospect of a speedy union with the man of her choice. On the contrary, the idea fluttered her tremendously; and a letter which came from him a few hours after Minna's return, imploring her to name the earliest day possible for their marriage, caused her to blush more uncomfortably and feel more profoundly happy than she had ever done in the whole course of her experience.

And Minna was almost as happy in her sister's happiness as in her own. She was never tired of hearing Amy talk about Joe and his manifold excellencies, and was incessantly introducing his name into the conversation for the pure pleasure of witnessing Amy's enjoyment of the subject. At the same time perhaps she did not quite forget that she was thus establishing a claim on her sister for a reciprocation of good offices when it should be known that she too had somebody whose name sounded pleasantly in her ears. For as yet she had said nothing about Raymond. She left him to open his suit for himself, and in the meantime was content that her father should ascribe the sudden change in her character and views of life entirely to her aversion for the bridegroom of her aunt's choice.

That night the sisters sat up talking as scandalously late as they had done on a previous occasion. This time, however, it was not down stairs but in their bedroom that the talk was held, which gave it quite a new character of cosiness and sisterly intimacy. Besides, when somehow or other they had actually succeeded in saying a final good-night, they remembered that next morning they were to renew their intercourse on the same footing, and not once more to become strangers to one another; and this made matters a great deal pleasanter. The thought of those five years which Amy was to spend in Ceylon was certainly a slight drawback on their an-

ticipatory enjoyment of the future; but then, let them be as far divided as they might, they would always be as sisters, and that was the only thing they need really care about. They were sisters, and nothing again should make them less than sisters—what a point that was to have established! Such a delicious thing as it was to have a sister! Minna's last waking impression was wonder how she had ever done without one.

Next day the enchantment for the home-returned wanderer was not broken by the sun shining through the little lattice-window on the staring best patchwork coverlet and the pair of old-fashioned Scripture prints adorning the coarsely papered walls. She took every thing in good part—the coverlet, the prints, the coarse paper; and not only these, but the sanded flags down stairs, the cleanly scrubbed deal table at which she was expected to breakfast, the cheap cups and saucers, the big brown loaf—all the beginnings of the daily routine of farm-house life. It was an actual pleasure to her to see every thing about her so different from what she had been accustomed to; the difference helped to mark the distinction between past and present. And then the novelty of it all was so charming! There were so many things to ask the names and the uses of—so many unknown household processes to watch and wonder at, and make-believe to assist in. To roll up her sleeves under pretense of helping, and stand looking at Amy making the pudding, was a sensation quite extraordinary in its newness. So was learning to make the beds, and so was winding up the roasting-jack. She did not feel a bit of shame in interesting herself in what she had hitherto regarded as work exclusively appropriated to servants. On the contrary, she took huge delight in her self-imposed tasks, fluttering joyously from one to another, and prying into every thing with the inquisitiveness of a spoiled child. The menial and the vulgar did not exist for her any more; every thing was delightful.

But she was so happy—probably that was the grand secret of her inability to criticise. She felt herself suddenly translated from bondage into freedom—freedom of body and soul—freedom to do what she liked with her own time without being haunted by the obligation of making morning calls and writing little pink notes in the third person, freedom to dress in her own way without worrying herself about newest fashions, freedom to love her father and Amy as much as nature prompted her to love them, and to show her love as openly as she chose. Above every thing, had she not the assurance of being beloved by Raymond? All the happiness which she found in her home, in her liberty, in the society of her father and Amy, came to her filtered through the medium of a still greater happiness that floated about her soul like a golden halo—the consciousness of Raymond's love. For in the midst of the excitement of these first hours of her return his image was constantly before her, giving a brighter tinge of color to whatever she saw, whether with bodily or mental vision. No wonder that she found all things perfect.

If John Haroldson and Amy had been very observant, they might have noticed that the commotion of Minna's spirits, instead of calming down, rather increased as the day advanced.

The fact was, she remembered Raymond's

promise that her father should hear from him before night; and as the evening approached she became more and more filled with a nervous yet not unpleasant flutter of expectation, of which an additional flow of gaiety was alike the expression and the mask. By a few diplomatically framed questions, she had managed to elicit that the last post arrived at Hollsworth some time before eight o'clock, and that shortly after that hour a letter might be delivered at the farmhouse. Though, as Amy sagely remarked, there was not likely to be any letter that evening, as this was one of Joe's days for getting away early, and he would almost certainly be coming in person. Egotistical Amy—she seemed to think that Joe was the only young man in the world who could write a letter. But Minna knew better, and began straightway to count how many hours there were till eight o'clock.

However mistaken Amy might have been in her deduction, she proved to be quite right in her premises. It was one of Joe's days for getting away early, and just as the family were sitting down to tea, Joe and Captain Pullyn were seen coming up the garden. Minna was quite delighted. The visitors would help to distract her from her self-consciousness as eight o'clock approached, and besides, she was glad to see them for their own sakes, having made up her mind to be very fond of them both.

Amy hastened out of the little parlor, where in compliment to Minna the tea-things had been laid, and went to admit her guests. Somehow Joe seemed much more difficult to admit than Captain Pullyn, for the latter preceded his son into the parlor by some two or three minutes. The old seaman had evidently been told of the transformation in Minna's character since he had seen her last; and, without thinking it necessary this time to ask any leave by word or look, walked straight up to her, took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Bless you, little Minnie, bless you from the bottom of the old cap'n's heart. I always had a feeling that you'd take the right tack at last."

Minna was slightly shocked for the first moment at finding herself so unceremoniously embraced, but she had determined to take nothing amiss from her old friend, and submitted with a good grace. There is even reason to believe that his kiss was not altogether unreciprocated. At all events he seemed quite satisfied with his reception.

"Bless you, Minna, bless you every day in the week and every week in the year. Why, what a bright happy little one it is! Jack Haroldson, what do you say to her now? Confound you, Jack, she ought to have been my daughter instead; you don't deserve a bit of her."

"I know I don't," said a choked voice which Minna at first hardly recognized as her father's. "But I love her—God knows how I love my little darling."

"Dear father!" said Minna, reaching him her hand.

She was beginning to feel a little choked too, when the door again opened, and Amy entered, showing in Joe and a strong smell of pomatum.

Looking very sheepish, Joe advanced to shake hands with his future sister-in-law, of whom, truth to say, he still stood rather in awe. Behind her back he spoke and thought of her as an angel,

or a brick, or a darling, just as he might have spoken and thought of Amy; but in her presence he could not help regarding the elegant town-bred young lady as somehow of a different clay from other people, and would have deemed it a freedom to apply such every-day epithets to her even in his own mind. Just now he thought of her only as the young lady or Miss Fanshawe, or, by a great effort of imagination, as Miss Minnie.

He had prepared a little speech of thanks which he began to murmur forth—rather stammering, for he felt the words slipping out of his memory as fast as he wanted them.

"Language fails me, miss—fails me—to express—to express how grateful . . ."

But, to his relief, Minna would not listen to him.

"No, no, please don't. You know very well that it is I who have to thank you—there, that will do. And don't call me Miss any thing, please (Joe had said 'miss' pure and simple, but she chose to ignore the vulgarism). My name is Minna."

She still thought of herself as Minna instead of Minnie; that modification of her Christian name was the only thing which had come to her from her aunt that she wished to retain. For Raymond had known her first under the name of Minna, and had called her by it, and it had thus become dearer to her than even that which sounded so familiar from the lips of her father and Amy.

But Joe was as yet far too shy to call her either Minna or Minnie, and only blushed very deeply.

And now they all took their places round the tea table, Joe and Amy getting together in the most natural way possible, and Minna finding herself between her father and Captain Pullyn. A happier group that evening's sun looked upon nowhere. The Captain had never been so hilarious, John Haroldson never so beaming, Joe and Amy never so loving, and Minna never so perfectly at home with every body about her. She had hours ago made up her mind that her father was the best and kindest and most indulgent father in the world; and now she found herself wondering how she could ever have disliked such a dear good-natured old darling as the captain, or such a fine manly young fellow as Joe, while she thought nothing could be more charming than to watch the innocent by-play between him and Amy.

Thus was she rewarded for throwing off the fear of the world in her judgment of her neighbors. When she had last seen Captain Pullyn and Joe, she had considered not their good qualities, but what her grand acquaintances at St. Austin's would think of seeing her with such friends, and had not dared to find them otherwise than detestable. Now she judged them according to her own canons of what was good and genial and worthy of liking, and found them delightful. She knew that they were not what society would call gentlemen, but she knew too that they were more generous and warm-hearted and chivalrous, more incapable of doing a mean action or of wounding the susceptibilities of others, than a great many whom it would call gentlemen, and felt that to be ashamed of them would be nothing less than dastardly. So fast was Minna

learning to emancipate herself from the tyranny of that external opinion whose judgments she had hitherto accepted as law. But then, as some qualification of her undoubted meritoriousness, it must be remembered that Raymond constituted her world now, and that she knew Joe to be already endorsed by his friendship.

Toward the end of tea, as a pause presented itself in the whispered talk of the lovers and the noisier chat of the old men, Joe glanced timidly round the table, and, finding Minna looking another way, felt emboldened to make a statement of general interest which had been on his mind all this time.

"I've got a piece of news for you this evening," he began, looking very hard into the dregs of his cup, and stirring them industriously with his spoon. "At least I ought not to say news, for you can't call a thing news exactly that has not happened, and perhaps never will; indeed, when I look at it in that light I don't know whether it is'n't foolish to say any thing about it at all, seeing it may only cause disappointment through coming to nothing, which it is as likely to do as not, and I don't deny it would be a disappointment to me both for myself and for others, but of course in this world we must all learn to bear our crosses, which may turn out for our good afterward though unpleasant at the time, the same as pills and long sermons and . . ."

"What the devil, Joe! cut it short, can't you?" exclaimed the captain impatiently, seeing that Joe was not likely to extricate himself spontaneously from the toils of his exordium. "News or no news, out with it, and don't make such a confounded long parley."

"Well, now that I have mentioned it, I suppose I must go on, but I do hope it won't be the cause of unfounded expectations. What I was going to say, then, is that there's a kind of chance—only a chance, you know—that I may get a rise without having to go to Ceylon after all."

A thrill of joyful surprise ran round the little table. Minna and Amy exchanged rapturous glances. Then perhaps the pleasant sisterly intercourse which they both found so delightful would not need to be suspended.

"Mind you, it's as uncertain as ever was," said Joe, cautiously. "But there's a talk of Brown Brothers dissolving partnership, and our Mr. Brown—Brown Stout as we call him—getting rid of the business out there altogether to the other Mr. Brown, who has always had more to do with it. It seems the Ceylon branch has been very badly managed lately, and last mail brought news of some ugly losses which made Brown Stout regularly foam up and tell the other one they would do better apart, and the other one answered back equally savage—so at least Tom Wiggett our youngest junior swears to having heard when in the room to put coals on. And that isn't all, for only this morning the other Brown asked David Rust, our senior clerk, who knows all about Ceylon from having been born there, what he would take for going out to put matters straight, and David promised to think it over, and afterward wrote to name a thousand a year. So if the partnership's dissolved, I shouldn't have to go out to Ceylon, and if old Davy gets his thousand a year, as I'm sure I hope he may, M'Conkey, the second clerk,

would step into his shoes, and I should step into M'Conkey's, at a salary of two fifty to my own certain knowledge. And if it wouldn't be glorious to have all that without leaving home for it, I don't know what would," concluded Joe, quite forgetting his caution, and taking to rub his hands lustily.

"Glorious! I should think so," chuckled the captain after him, rubbing his hands too.

"It would be the only thing that could make me any happier than my little Minna has made me already," said John Haroldson, glancing fondly from one of his daughters to the other.

The sisters said nothing, but smiled and nodded to each other across the table.

"But it may all turn out quite different, you know," said Joe despondingly, recalled to prudence by the elation of the others. "It wouldn't be the first time there have been reports in the office which have come to nothing. Better think no more about it."

"I can't help thinking about it," murmured John Haroldson, shaking his head. "It is too pleasant not to be thought about. You needn't throw cold water on us, Joe."

"I wish I hadn't mentioned it, almost," said Joe uneasily.

Here Captain Pullyn came to the rescue.

"If that's the way you take it, Jack, Joe is quite right to throw cold water on you. People who are always looking ahead for good luck are just the ones that never come up with it; and to-day you've got good luck enough alongside of you to keep you content for a thousand year."

"I know that," said the farmer, slipping his arm round his eldest daughter's waist.

"Alongside of you and of me too," continued the captain, looking down affectionately on Minna. "Betwixt us she is—the prettiest smiling piece of luck that ever my eyes rested upon. Here's to her health and long life! It's a shame to drink such a toast only in a cup of tea, but we'll do it in grog at supper, and Amy shall mix it extra strong on purpose."

"Can Amy mix grog? That will be another lesson for me to learn. I have been learning so many things to-day, captain."

"Have you indeed, my hearty? That's well."

"Oh! so many things. To lay the cloth for dinner, and roast a joint, and make a pudding. I am to try my hand on the pudding next Sunday. I hope you don't think that bad news, captain? And there's another thing I want to learn, but that I must get you to teach me. I think you smoke, don't you?"

"Smoke! My heart alive! who would have thought of you wanting to learn smoking!"

Minna shook her head at him saucily.

"You are a very naughty man, and I've a good mind not to say another word to you all the evening. What I want is yes or no to my question. Do you smoke?"

"I'm afraid I do, but don't set it down against me. I won't before you, my rose-bud."

"Yes, but you shall before me, and you shall begin this very evening after supper. And what you have got to teach me is how to fill your pipe."

The captain stared with as much wonderment as if it had been the Queen of the Fairies who made offer of this homely service.

"Fill my pipe—you—with those dainty little hands fit for nothing but piano-playing. What do you know about filling pipes?"

"Nothing at all yet, or I shouldn't want to be taught. But I have heard of young ladies filling pipes for gentlemen whom they want very much to please, and I want very much to please you, captain."

"Hear her! the monkey! Jack, ain't you jealous?"

"Not a bit of it," said John Haroldson stoutly. "It's you would be jealous of me if you had heard the things she has been saying to me all day."

"Oh! she's a deep one, she is. And you mean to say the smell of 'baccy won't make you ill?"

"It won't be the first time I have smelt tobacco," said Minna, thinking of Lord Fitz-John.

"Well, will you teach me?"

"Oh yes! I'll teach you. Well, of all the rum things I ever heard of," went on the captain musingly, "this is one of the rummest. She's willing to see me smoke, and what's more, wants to make one of them pretty little fingers a tobacco-stopper for me. Not that it's the first time I've heard of a lady setting up as a tobacco-stopper—ha! ha! ha! Tom Stokes's wife was one, she used to throw her husband's pipes into the fire as fast as he bought 'em until she took it into her head they made the chimney smoke, and then she drowned 'em in the water butt. Poor Tom—he wouldn't have minded much if she'd gone in after them, I think—ha! ha! ha! She was a Tartar was Tom Stokes's wife."

"Ah! but I'll be a tobacco-stopper of the right sort," said Minna—"you shall see."

This kind of talk made time slip by with wonderful rapidity, and soon it was late enough for the candles to be lit, whereupon cards were produced, and Minna was initiated into the mysteries of Pope Joan. The laughing, and talking, and whispering that there was over those cards, to be sure! The bad jokes that were made, and the bursts of laughter they elicited! The special delight every one took in teasing the lovers! There was a roar when somebody suggested that Joe and Amy should go partners, and another roar when Joe innocently announced that he had got matrimony, and another roar when Amy played hearts. And on each occasion John Haroldson roared the loudest, laughing at every joke till the tears ran down his cheeks. Amy looked on him in amazement; she had had no idea of the capacity for mirth that was in him.

Somewhere between eight and nine o'clock, just as the merriment was at its height, a sharp ring made itself heard through the house; and Minna, remembering what she had learned of Hollisworth postal arrangements, felt herself suddenly getting very hot.

"Hollo! what's that?" said the captain.

"It must be the postman, I think," said Amy. "Nobody else gives such a ring."

"Oh indeed! What sort of a ring do you give, Joe? Plain gold—hey?"

Every body laughed—except Amy, who went to open the door, and Joe, who followed to assist. After a little delay their task was accomplished, and they came back, Amy bearing a letter.

"For me!" said John Haroldson, looking at the superscription. "Who has taken to write to me, I wonder?—I haven't got any lovers."

He broke the seal, and Minna bent her eyes on her cards with an air of absorbed interest, though for the moment she had completely forgotten how to play them.

"That's right, Minnie—nothing like application to business," said the captain. "It's my lead this time, and I'll play hearts out of compliment to Amy. Eight of hearts, nine of hearts—ten of hearts wanted. Ten of hearts wanted, Jack. Look into your father's hand, Minnie; he is too much taken up with his love-letter to mind his business."

Minna made a pretense of obeying, and in so doing managed to glance up into her father's face. His eyes were riveted on the letter as though he would never be able to take them off again. Yes, evidently it was *the* letter; none other would have power to interest him so. It must have surprised him very much, for he had got quite pale over it; but that was not at all strange, thought Minna, oh no! not at all strange under the circumstances; any body watching her would no doubt think she looked pale too. He must be so surprised, you know!

"Well, Jack, who is it? A rich widow?"

Minna trembled to hear the question, afraid that her father would forthwith publish the contents of the letter; and if he did, she felt that she must straightway sink into the earth.

"Oh! nothing—nothing—only an old bill," was the answer, and Minna blessed her father from the bottom of her heart for his delicate consideration of her feelings.

He crushed the letter into his pocket (where Minna was afraid it would get sadly crumpled), and after a moment's pause said—

"I have just thought of something I've got to do. You must get on without me for a little while."

He rose and turned from the table so quickly that Minna was not able to get another view of his face before he left the room. He had gone to read the letter over again in private, she thought to herself; he was evidently a little agitated by it, but that was only natural.

Meanwhile the game went briskly on, and Minna was obliged to rouse herself from her pre-occupation as best she could. But the effort of playing cards whose very names she hardly remembered, and of laughing at sallies which she had scarcely heard, began to be more and more irksome, and she was relieved when, some ten minutes after her father had left the table, she heard his voice calling to her from the stair-case—

"Minnie!"

She laid down her cards, and, asking to be excused for a few minutes, quitted the room with a beating heart. The stair-case was quite dark except for a ray of dim candlelight that escaped through the half-open door of her father's room; but, dark as it was, she felt herself blushing hotly as she ascended it. Was she not going to be asked for her decision on the question nearest her heart?

CHAPTER XXXV.

FORBIDDING THE BANNS.

If Minna had been less absorbed than she was in blushing self-consciousness, even the dull light of the solitary candle that burned in her

father's room would have sufficed to show her, as she entered, that something was wrong.

No mere shock of surprise at finding the hand of his newly returned daughter so soon demanded of him could account for the change which a few minutes had wrought on his face and manner, lately so joyous. He was sitting by a small table on which his arm rested heavily as though for support, his features were pale and drawn, his mouth nervously twitching; altogether he looked ten years older than the John Haroldson who had been playing at Pope Joan with such gusto down stairs. But Minna's eyes were cast demurely on the ground, and these signs of agitation were lost on her.

He looked up on hearing her footstep, and beckoned her, saying hoarsely—

"I have a letter here—a letter." He held up a letter which Minna recognized as the one which had just been brought to him; but though she observed this, she did not observe, as she might have done, that his fingers trembled so that he could scarcely hold it.

He paused a moment as if for breath, then went on—

"He says you know all about it, Minnie, but that's not true, is it? Oh! no, no! it is not true—I see it is not. He is nothing to you, or you would have told me of it yourself, would you not?"

Minna dropped down on her knees, and, taking one of her father's hands in hers, bent her face very low over it, as much perhaps to hide her blushes as for any thing else, for it did not occur to her to imagine that there could be any special need for entreaty in pleading Raymond's cause.

"I knew he was going to write so soon that I thought it better to wait. Oh! he is so good! I shall never be able to tell you how good he is. It was he who first made me see how wicked I was in neglecting my dear, dear father so long. Shall I confess a secret to you, father? I am afraid there would not have been this change in me, this blessed, blessed change, if I had not—oh! I don't know how to tell you, but you must not laugh at me—if I had not—liked him, in fact—and hated myself for choosing that dreadful Lord Fitz-John instead. So you see how much cause I have to be grateful to him, father dear. You are grateful to him too—for my sake, you know—just a little tiny bit, are you not?"

She paused for an answer, still stooping over her father's hand, for she felt her face in such a blaze of blushes that she dared not encounter his eyes.

But no answer came; only dead silence, and with a heavy sinking at her heart she instinctively began to feel that something was amiss. What could it be? Suddenly it flashed across her mind that he might think her marriage involved another parting between them, and her heart rose again. In that case it was not wonderful that he should object.

"He does not want to take me away from you—I hope you don't think that. Has he not told you? You are to live with us, father dear, and he is to help me to take care of you—those were his own words. Were they not pretty words, father? I felt I should never be able to thank him enough for them. Oh! he is so kind and

good and generous, you have no idea. But you will know it when you see him—you will like him so much, so much. Don't you feel already that you are going to like him? Oh, do tell me!"

She paused again, but again there was no answer. The suspense was too great to be endured, and with a sudden movement of fear she gazed up into his face. Alas! she had never seen its expression so hopelessly dark and rigid, and the eyes seemed to be looking far away from her.

"Father, what is the matter? You are not angry, surely?"

At her cry his eyes became instantly fixed on her again, and the tenderness returned to them at once.

"Angry, my darling! angry!"

He drew her nearer to him, and pressed a long loving kiss on her upturned face.

"Father, my own dear father! you make me so happy!"

To her surprise she discovered him to be trembling violently.

"Minnie," he began, with an endeavor to steady himself, smoothing her soft hair with his hand, and again looking away from her—"Minnie..."

Just then a tap was heard at the chamber door, and Amy entered to say that supper was ready down stairs. But her father shook his head.

"Never mind me—I am not going down stairs again this evening."

"Not going down again!" cried Amy astonished. "Are you not well?"

"Not very well," he answered wearily, turning away his face so that she should not discover how pale it was; "and Minnie is kind enough to keep me company, you see. No, no—it is nothing; don't fidget, little woman. Run down again, and enjoy yourself."

Amy lingered a moment, but, seeing that her father was not inclined for farther conversation, reluctantly withdrew to superintend the maimed rites of supper-time down stairs.

The interruption caused by her entrance seemed to have given John Haroldson time for gathering new strength, for no sooner had she left the room than he said, in a hollow, sepulchral, but still firm voice—

"Minnie, you will never speak again about my making you happy. I was not born to make any one happy—I have found that out now. Child, it can not be; put it out of your mind at once; it can never, never be."

Minna trembled in her very heart to hear these words, and yet could hardly believe that she understood their application. She looked at him, but his eyes were still steadily averted.

"What can not be? Father, for Heaven's sake tell me. What can not be?"

"What you were speaking of just now—what he speaks of in that letter."

"That you should live with us, do you mean? But you must, you shall."

"That my daughter should ever be that man's wife," he answered, looking far into space.

"That man's—Raymond's! Father, father, what are you saying?"

"It is impossible."

"Why impossible? Father, darling father, think a little—why impossible?"

She was kneeling by his side, and spoke the last words in tones of entreaty that might have been deemed irresistible. But he only gazed be-

fore him with stony rigidity, and repeated the fatal word—

"Impossible."

"But why, why? What! you would break my heart and not tell me why?"

He threw his arms about her with passionate affection, and kissed and fondled her as though she had been a child again.

"No, no, no, not break your heart. Break my little Minnie's heart—my God! But I know better than that, child—never fear. Why, it is only a little girl's fancy, and people don't break their hearts for a fancy. Break your heart—hush, hush, that's all nonsense."

"But it will," she cried impetuously, "it must. Oh! if you only knew what he is, if you knew how I feel toward him! What do you mean, father? what makes you so cruel to your little Minnie? You love her, don't you?"

The closeness of his embrace was a sufficient reply to her last question. But to what she had asked before he never answered a word.

She looked at him in amazement. He was becoming more and more enigmatical. If he had not been her father—her own real father who had gathered wild primroses with her in days of old—she would have been angry with what she would have deemed his injustice and unreasonableness; but, as it was, she was only grieved and perplexed. Her heart told her that she was not now dealing with one who cared for her only as a pretty plaything or useful instrument of ambition, but with a loving father who would lay down his life to do her good. And then his poor careworn face, which looked at her so sadly and sorrowfully! No, come what would, she could not be angry.

"Darling father, you who are so good and kind, how can you vex me so? You know very well that—that what I—what he asks of you is not impossible. If it were, there would be some reason why it should be so; and see, you have none to give. Nothing can be impossible without a reason, you know. What is the reason against this? None at all, therefore it is quite possible, dear."

She had been too intent on her persuasive logic to notice the cold sweat that had been gathering on her father's brow while she spoke; and just as she thought to have arrived at a triumphant conclusion, she was strangely startled to hear him exclaim vehemently—

"No. There is a reason. His father..."

He stopped abruptly, and sank back on his chair as though exhausted by the effort he had made. Then, seeing that she was watching him in perplexed astonishment, he went on confusedly—

"His father—yes, as I said, his father. His father was a bad man, Minnie. That is reason enough—reason enough."

This time Minna was indignant—not exactly with her father, but with his argument.

"How can you say such a thing? Oh! how unjust! how cruelly unjust! Was it his fault that he had a bad man for his father? I should think not indeed—no more than it is my merit to have a good one for mine."

John Haroldson shuddered as though in pain, but she was too much excited to heed him, and continued—

"So infamously unjust! He has done no harm; he has done every thing that is good and noble, and made up with his own money all the wrong

that his father did. To call *that* a reason against him! Why, it is only a reason to love him all the better. And I do love him the better for it—I love him with my whole heart."

"Minnie!"

"I do, I do. Oh father, make me happy, and say I may love him before all the world."

"Marry him! Never. Minnie, take notice—never, never."

"Why not? Because he has a bad father?"

"That is not the only reason."

"What other can there be?"

He did not answer.

"Father, what other?"

"I can not say—I do not know," he stammered feebly. "But . . ."

"You do not know!"

"Perhaps you would not be happy with him. Nobody can tell beforehand what marriages will be happy and what miserable. It is according as there is a curse or a blessing on them. On this there would be—that is, there might be for any thing you could tell, you know . . ."

"Father!"

"A curse. None of us can be sure. I read once of a strange accident at a wedding; there was a thunder-storm, and the bride was struck dead before the altar. Who can tell what cause there may have been for it? Nobody knows what is going to happen. Perhaps the church might fall and crush us all under it—I have read of things like that too."

He was getting quite incoherent in his agitation; he gesticulated wildly with his hands, and his eyes wandered restlessly about the room as those of a fever patient. Minna thought she began to understand the mystery of his conduct. The emotions of the past day and night had unnerved him completely, and the farther excitement of Raymond's letter was more than he could just then bear. Evidently he was ill and slightly delirious—this explained every thing. She was sorry to have pressed him as she had, and determined not to say more on the subject for another day or two, when he should be stronger in body and mind; she had no fear of what his answer would be then.

"Dear father, I see you are very, very tired"—and indeed his voice had failed him in pure exhaustion. "You have been over exerting yourself to-day, and I have been very wrong to make you speak so much. We will talk of this again another time, but just now you must rest. Forget all about it, father, and I will forget it too."

"Oh yes! you will forget it, child—take my word that you will forget it, and be very happy still. You are so young, you know."

Perhaps Minna involuntarily shook her head at the suggestion that she could ever forget Raymond, for her father looked at her sharply as though a sudden suspicion had occurred to him.

"You are not going to marry him without telling me!" he cried, almost with a shriek.

"No, no, father, how can you ask such a thing? Of course not. I will do nothing without telling you, I promise."

"Or without my consent? Will you promise never to marry him without my consent?"

"I promise never to marry and leave you alone, father. I have given you and Amy both my word, and I will keep it."

She would not make her promise uncondition-

al. Why she hardly knew; but in truth it was because she remembered what Joe had said that evening of the possibility of his not going to Ceylon. If her father had Amy to take care of him, she almost unconsciously argued, would not Raymond be entitled to say that the girl he had saved from self-immolation should be his wife? It seemed to her that she had no right to sacrifice his happiness to the mere caprice of another, even though that other were her own father.

John Haroldson's quick suspicion appeared to divine the motive of her half-involuntary reservation, for he rejoined instantly—

"No, but never, never, come what may. Remember, you must never marry Raymond Lee."

"We will speak of it another time," she answered tremulously. "No more just now. Dear father, you are looking very ill. Do rest a little, and take care of yourself. Lean back in your chair—so. Shall I bring you a pillow? There, now you look more comfortable."

She kissed him tenderly on the forehead; let him be as unreasonable as he would, he was her own darling father, and she could not choose but love him dearly. And he looked so ill—so feeble and helpless as he lay back in his chair, prostrate from the effects of recent agitation—her very heart bled for him.

Before he had recovered sufficiently to speak again, Amy's tap was heard once more at the door. This time the little housewife had come to announce that Captain Pullyn and Joe were going away and wanted to say good-bye to Minna. The elder sister looked hesitatingly at her father, hardly liking to leave him while he was apparently so ill. But he made a sign to her that she was to go.

"Yes, yes, run down and see them, Minnie; I shall do better alone. Don't look so scared, Amy child, there is nothing the matter—nothing worse than there has been this fifteen year. I had forgotten it a bit, and this is how I'm punished. There, get down stairs both of you; I'd rather be by myself."

The girls obeyed and went out—Minna feeling very heavy-hearted at the result of the interview to which she had looked forward with so much pleasant trepidation, but still telling herself that all would certainly come right in another day or two. It could not be otherwise.

They found Captain Pullyn and Joe waiting in the passage to take leave.

"Good-bye, little Minnie," said the captain, "good-bye and good night. It's been a regular damper on us, you and father being on leave of absence so long—I can compare it to nothing except an extra glass of water in the grog. But never mind—better luck another time."

"Yes, better luck another time," said Minna cheerfully, accepting the words as of good omen. "Good-bye, captain, and good-bye, Joe, for I don't intend to call you any thing else now."

The leave-takings were all concluded and the captain had got the front door open, when that stupid fellow Joe suddenly discovered that he had left his hat in the parlor, whither he and Amy both went back to look for it. The captain and Minna discreetly made no attempt to follow, and even moved a few paces forward into the garden.

"What a beautiful night!" said Minna, looking upward.

"Tidy enough if it lasts. Which way is the wind, I wonder? Hollo! there's what you don't see every night. Look at the sky over there."

"How light it is, to be sure! But you often see the sky so in this neighborhood, I suppose?"

"Not that way. That way, east-north-east, is St. Austin's way—the coal country lies more to the other side. But it's nothing particular, I dare say. What a time that Joe is! Ahoy! inside there—are you never coming?"

Joe and Amy both came running out in great confusion.

"Well, you are pretty ones to look for any thing, are you two. Are you ready now? See the sky there, Joe—looks almost like a fire at St. Austin's, don't it?"

"It's a big one if it is," said Joe, "to show all this way. But St. Austin's is just the place for a big fire, with all that wharfage and shipping."

"A fire!" cried Minna. Oh! I hope not."

"I dare say it isn't," said Joe. "Nothing more than the regular lights, perhaps; this being a dark evening, they'd show a long way off."

"May be so," said the captain. "I remember first time I went up to London it was a night something like this, and the sky looked very much the same as we were getting near. All the country-bred ones made sure it was a fire, but the coachman said it was nothing more than usual, and sure enough he was right. Ah! London's a queer place."

"I couldn't bear to live in London," said Amy. "I should always be frightened about something or other."

"Well, let's hope Joe will never carry you off there. Good-night, my hearties. Take care of father, and let him be well against the next game at Pope Joan."

A chorus of good-nights followed, after which the captain and Joe took their departure, and Minna was left speculating whether Raymond would be present at that next game or not.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RUINS.

On the following morning, in that unfashionable quarter of St. Austin's where are congregated the wharves and dock-yards and large warehouses which give the town its importance, the sun rose upon a scene of devastation on which he had not set the evening before. A mass of buildings which he had left yesterday one of the largest and busiest establishments in the place he found this morning a group of gaunt, blackened walls, showing the gray day-light through the square openings which had once been windows, and here and there seamed with ominous smoke-stained fissures. Now and then through those same dismantled windows might be seen for a moment some pale tongue of flame leaping high into the air and then falling again—a lingering flicker of that fierce blaze which had illuminated the sky last night.

A weird desolate-looking sight it was—desolate in spite of the busy ever-shifting crowd of on-lookers that surrounded it. If ruins which are the work of time are generally pleasant and attractive to the eye, there is always something dreary and spectral, not to say downright ugly,

about ruins made by fire. The tender gray tints of natural decay are replaced by unsightly black streaks and patches bearing witness to recent violence, the rounded moss-grown forms by stiff angular outlines twisted as though in the contortions of pain. In one case all is soft and gray and venerable; in the other all is bare and black and uncanny. In one case all traces of former life and occupation have moldered away or been removed; in the other some tokens are sure to be left to tell the tale of suddenly and fearfully interrupted activity. The difference is as between the remains from which life has departed naturally and peacefully and the corpse of a murdered man.

As has been said, if the scene looked desolate it was not for want of spectators. A large and motley crowd had been drawn together from all quarters of the town, and was assembled as near to the tottering walls as policemen and firemen would allow it to approach—its numbers rather increasing than diminishing with the advance of day-light. Most of those indeed who had been on the spot all night dropped off as it became manifest that the excitement of the fire was over, but their places were quickly filled by the fresh spectators whom the morning brought to see the extent of the mischief; and it seemed likely that the influx of new comers would be kept up all day. As usual in such cases, the greater part of the crowd had been brought together by mere curiosity; but here and there men and women might be seen with distressed anxious-looking faces which showed that they had a personal concern in the disaster.

There was a Babel of voices which it perplexed the ear to follow, and a conflict of statements and theories no less confusing to the understanding.

"Fun's about over now, Jim. Let's turn in and have a drop of something."

"Look here! Why it's been the biggest fire as ever I see!"

"Fifty thousand pounds clean gone."

"Hollo! when did you come? Does your mother know you're out?"

"A hundred thousand pounds worth of property if it's a penny."

"Did you see the roof fall in?"

"Insured for a hundred and fifty thousand."

"I thought half the town would have caught at one time."

"A bad job. And they say there's not a farthing of insurance on it."

"Yes, ma'am, my husband's worked there man and boy this twenty year. It'll be hard if they don't do something for us after that, and me the mother of ten, and seven living."

"And my youngest, ma'am, isn't six months till next Thursday week, and as fine a one as you ever set eyes upon. It looks as if something ought to be done, don't it? and these such bad times and work so scarce—oh dear! dear!"

"Hollo! what's up now?"

"The gentleman says he has lost his watch."

"Don't he wish he may get it?"

"If I had a donkey that wouldn't go."

"My eye! here's a dog! Hi! Tiny, Tiny, Tiny! Speak to 'em—cats—hi!"

"They say he'll be ruined outright."

"Ruined—pooh—people ain't ruined so easy as that. I don't believe he'll be a pin the worse."

"What! the little workshop standing by itself to the right hand as you go in—you don't think the things have been burned in that, do you?"

"Only the walls left standing. Why, what is it? Nothing there of yours, I hope?"

"A matter of ten pun' worth of tools perhaps. It's hard on a poor man. Never mind—I can bear it as well as another; there are plenty more here as bad off. Only the times are so hard, and I don't know what my old woman'll say."

"I could tell it was going to be a regular big 'un from the time I saw the first puff of smoke. Lord bless you, I know what a fire is. I says to a friend at the time—'Bill,' says I, 'mark my words,' says I. . . ."

"Is it insured?"

"Somebody told me for two hundred thousand."

"I heard for half a million."

"It ain't insured at all, if that's what you want to know."

"I say, ain't you getting dry?"

"The Blue Lion is where I go."

"That's him himself talking to the firemen at this very minute."

"Where? The little squat man?"

"No. The tall 'un. He's been working the engines all night with his own hands."

"That's just what I say, ma'am—somebody ought to do something. It ain't our fault nor yet the poor innocent children's, and I don't see what right we've got to suffer. And I say fire or no fire, it oughtn't to make no difference to us."

"Och! and sure the master won't let it. And O'Kelly that's so regular in his habits that he finds his way home every night like a blind man's dog, even with the whisky in his head so that he ain't able to see out of his eyes for it. Sure the master's too much the jintleman to turn him off, and all for nothin'."

"He'll have the heart of a stone if he don't do something for us. But handsome is as handsome does—that's what I've always said, and always will if you kill me for it."

"What, Charley, so you've come to take a peep, have you? What do you think of it?"

"I never saw a place so regularly gutted in my life."

"Yonder is a bit of wall that will topple down before evening, or I'm mistaken."

"Well, it's worth coming to look at, that's certain. Got a light any where about you?"

The masses of mouldering brick-work before which this many-tongued discourse was going forward were all that was left of Raymond Lee's factory.

A careless workman had let a spark fall among some loose shavings, a blaze had ensued, which, favored by a high wind and the usual delay in the arrival of assistance, had communicated itself to explosive matter prepared for the filling of shells, and then wholesale destruction became inevitable. The flames flew from one workshop to another, destroying every thing they found on their way, including an expensive new range of buildings in course of erection, and a more than usually valuable stock just ready to be sent from the premises in execution of a large order from abroad. Such was the fury of the fire that in a short time every chance

disappeared of saving any portion of the factory or its contents; and it was only by the most strenuous exertions that the flames were kept from spreading to the surrounding warehouses and threatening destruction to the whole neighborhood. A fire on such a scale had never been known at St. Austin's before. No wonder it created some little sensation.

And the person chiefly interested—Raymond Lee himself—how did he take it?

Externally he was perfectly calm and composed, and, judging by appearances, he would have been pronounced of all the crowd the one who had least personal part in the misfortune and its consequences. All that night he had been hard at work helping the firemen, but, as has been seen, their exertions were made rather on behalf of adjoining property than with a hope of saving any remnant of his; nor had a single expression of regret on his own account escaped his lips. And now that the work of destruction was at an end, his stoicism did not for an instant relax. He remained on the spot, calmly examining the condition of the ruins and consoling his work-people under the loss of their tools and employment, without once referring to his own share in the calamity.

Yet that share was a very heavy one—so heavy that he might well have been excused for showing some concern under it.

The gossips were mistaken who said that he was absolutely ruined by the fire—at least he hoped and believed that he was not—but the gossips were equally mistaken who said he would be none the worse for it. In the same way the truth lay between the rumors representing the premises as heavily insured and those representing them as not insured at all. There was an insurance, but it was a small one—for a few thousands only, scarcely covering a sixth part of the property destroyed. The business being specially hazardous in its nature, the premium demanded was proportionately high, and Raymond's uncle had therefore preferred to be mostly his own insurer, paying the premium to himself in the shape of profits. In this arrangement Raymond had made no change during the few months which had passed since his uncle's death, not perhaps allowing sufficiently for the diminution of his resources consequent on his payments to his father's victims. For, in his self-imposed act of restitution, Raymond had taxed himself more heavily than was generally supposed. From the very circumstance of his voluntarily making so large a sacrifice, people had chosen to think that boundless wealth remained behind, but in fact he had at that time given up the greater part of his realized property—since then still farther diminished by a bad season and the failure of a foreign agent. Thus it only needed the fire—destroying, as it had done, not only his premises and machinery, but an accidentally large stock representing some thousand pounds' worth of outlay—to transform him from a rich man into a comparatively poor one.

But, though knowing full well that this had been the effect of the disaster, he would not give himself time to think of it until he had done what he could for those poor workmen who in a season of some scarcity had suddenly, without fault of their own, been thrown out of employment, many with the loss of valuable tools. On

leaving the scene of the fire his first act was to go to his bankers, and, after setting apart a certain sum to meet legal demands against his house, he drew out all the immediate available funds remaining to him, for distribution among his work-people. In the afternoon the apportionment was made with his own hand, the interval having been spent in a careful calculation of the respective claims of the applicants; and then for the first time he found himself alone and free to consider what had happened from the point of view of his own interests.

He would have to make a fresh start, or something like a fresh start, in life—he saw that. A new business would have to be constructed with labor and patience out of the wrecks of the old one before his fortunes could be restored to the condition from which they had fallen. But labor and patience would do much; and the ruins of the past, even though they are only ruins, may sometimes form very solid foundations for the future. Raymond Lee was not a man to lose heart under misfortune, but rather one of those who gather new energy in difficulty. And just now he had that within which gave him tenfold courage to meet and surmount all the ills of life. In fighting his own way upward he would be fighting Minna's too, and therefore he could not choose but fight well. He knew that with such a wife the struggle *must* be successful, and could only feel regret at the temporary reverse of fortune because for a while she would have to share it.

It can not be denied that for this reason, though for this reason only, the trial had something of bitterness for him. He had hoped at once to surround his bride with all the luxuries to which she had been accustomed, and which under his influence she had renounced; and now he would be able for a time to offer her little besides his love, and a quiet old-fashioned home which only love could make other than dull. He had been intending to change his ugly brick house in its out-of-the-way situation for a new abode in a fashionable neighborhood; he had resolved that his young wife should appear in society, and shine there, if not as often, at least quite as brightly as of old. Carriages, jewels, rich furniture—none of these had been omitted from the dream with which he had been pleasing himself, never doubting that it would be in his power to realize it. And now they would all have to be waited for—all to be postponed to an uncertain, possibly remote, future. He could not but feel disappointed.

But Minna's love would have been ample consolation under far heavier trouble, and of Minna's love he was as confident now as he had once been doubtful. *She* would not be disappointed, he knew full well, at the change in his and her fortunes; except for his sake she would not for an instant regret it. The girl who had seen through and given up the delusive splendor of a title, the girl who had freely exchanged Mrs. Fanshawe's drawing-room for the kitchen at Black Moor Farm—there was no danger of such a one lamenting the loss of luxuries of which she was already tired. Perhaps she would even be all the better pleased to do without them. The marriage need not and would not be delayed for a day in consequence of what had happened; nay, it might actually take place earlier

than would have been possible if there had been a new house to buy and to furnish.

This last idea as it occurred to him excited his impatience to fever pitch, and he resolved that he must go to see his Minna that same evening and hear what comfort she had to give him. It was true that he had not yet received Mr. Haroldson's answer to his letter demanding her hand, but surely at such a time he would not be expected to wait for mere formalities. Minna was to all intents and purposes his affianced wife, and he could not for another day forego his privilege of seeking counsel and consolation from her love.

He was bent upon going to see her, and he went, but it might have been better for him if he had waited.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WATERS.

THAT afternoon, while Raymond was thus deliberating, there came to St. Austin's two travelers, a man and a woman.

Not comfortable well-to-do first-class passengers of the sort who step out of a cushioned railway carriage into a fly and get themselves driven off to the best hotel in the town. They were a shabby, broken-down-looking couple, who came slipping out of a third-class carriage, and immediately on leaving the station turned into the first poor street which presented itself, wandering along in a purposeless dejected kind of way, as though they did not quite know where they were going. As they went on, it might have been seen that they had an instinctive preference for the streets that were mean and narrow and squalid, probably feeling that the man's rusty black and the woman's draggled skirts and faded ribbons would be less out of place there than elsewhere; but beyond this they had apparently no plan of route. When they came to a cross-road they would hesitate a moment, consult together by a glance or a word, and then pursue their way slowly and wearily, looking vaguely from side to side as if in search of some still undetermined place of rest or shelter.

They had no home in the town, that was evident; and whatever profit they may have hoped to get from their visit was probably for the present only dubious and contingent. At least every detail of their manner and appearance suggested that they were engaged in an experiment.

Perhaps the most noticeable thing about this pair was that, except when a moment's consultation was necessary, there was complete absence of communication between them. They walked side by side, but this was all. Neither seemed to care for the company or conversation of the other, or to derive from the other the slightest comfort or support. They did not go hand-in-hand or arm-in-arm, but always apart, each carrying a small bundle apparently containing the worldly goods of each, and neither of the two once offering to relieve the other. What made the omission more marked was that one of them—the man—was plainly in bad health, dragging his limbs after him with difficulty, and now and then coughing a hollow cough which seemed to come from the depths of his chest and left his sunken cheeks ominously flushed. Yet, though the woman accommodated

her pace to his, and when he stopped to take breath stopped too, she never offered her arm to assist him or spoke a sympathizing word, but on these occasions only stood looking at him with dark imperious eyes that expressed manifest impatience.

They had wandered on some way between rows of shabby smoke-begrimed shops and houses until at last they found themselves passing in front of a seedy-looking establishment calling itself an eating-house, through the open door of which came the sound of plates and knives and the smell of cooking. As though by a common impulse, the wayfarers came here to an involuntary pause, and looked in the direction of the sound and the smell with eyes that were unmistakably hungry. Then they looked at each other, and the man brought out of his pocket a long but terribly meagre purse which he felt at both ends as though to make sure of the amount of its contents.

The result of the calculation appeared to be favorable, for he answered his companion's inquiring glance with a sign in the affirmative, and made way for her to precede him into the house. This she did, looking sharply behind her however, to see that he followed.

Through a passage whose walls were shiny with the friction of dirty coat-sleeves, they entered the public room—a square scantily furnished apartment, with a carpetless floor plentifully sprinkled with saw-dust, and an atmosphere impregnated with a permanent smell of tobacco and boiled greens. Here they found two or three groups of diners already sitting at as many rickety little oblong tables, and looking silently at each other, they made their way to the farthest corner of the room, where they took their places apart from the rest of the guests. To a sleepy-looking lad with an apron who came up to know what they wanted, they gave an order for bread and cold meat, which fare had no sooner been placed before them than they began to eat with an appetite which evidently required no artificial assistance. But even the reviving influence of what was probably their first meal that day did not remove the barrier which seemed to exist between them. Though sitting side by side at the same table, they were still sundered by an almost unbroken silence.

Others in the room, however, were not so taciturn. In particular, at a table some way behind the new comers, a good deal of conversation was going forward, scraps of which, since the conversers were by no means shy, were now and then to be heard in every part of the room.

"Did you see the fire last night?"

"I hung about looking at it for the best part of two hours till I began to get chilly, and then I turned into bed. I don't want another go of rheumatism, I can tell you. But I saw the best of it. Did you?"

"Never heard a word of it till this morning. But you see I am a heavy sleeper, and so's my missus. I went to look this morning though. A regular bad job."

"They say Lee will be ruined."

"So bad as that, do you think? Have another drop of beer."

"Well, I don't mind if I do. And you, Mr. Potter?"

"Only a drop. Just not to leave any thing

in the jug, you know. Did either of you two hear that first explosion?"

"No. I suppose it was a pretty bad one."

"I was two streets off at the time, and I'm blest if I didn't think it was something in the earthquake line."

"It was gunpowder, wasn't it?"

"Some nasty bounceable stuff of that sort. That's the worst of those gun-making places, they are always blowing up."

"Like somebody you know of at home? Eh! Mr. Sims?"

"Don't be personal, Mr. Thompson. Do you believe in Lee being ruined?"

"Can't say, really. It's an ugly business for him, anyhow."

"It's ugly for others besides him. Look at the hands there will be out of work."

"And I'm sure rates is heavy enough already."

"You'll see they'll be heavier still before you're another half year older."

"You think we're going to have bad times, then?"

"Well, it looks like it, don't it?"

Whether or not it was that the sound of voices disturbed him, the man in the corner seemed to lose all relish for his meal as this conversation proceeded.

Once he turned round as if about to put a question, but at sight of the speakers—three middle-aged men of the small-tradesmen class—he appeared to change his mind, and remained silent. His appetite, however, did not return; he laid his knife and fork together and pushed his plate away. The woman was more stolid, and, though probably keeping her ears open, went on eating with apparent unconcern.

After a while the three friends who had been dining together went away, and once more the man in the corner looked round. Besides himself and his companion only one person was now left in the room. This was a young man of eighteen or nineteen, who looked like an apprentice, and who was enjoying the seemingly unwonted luxury of a cold slice of indigestible plum-pudding in conjunction with a stale illustrated paper. After eyeing him attentively for a while, the traveler began—

"Fine afternoon this."

The young man was so very young that he felt complimented by the notice thus taken of him, and put down his paper as he answered—

"Yes, very fine. Rather dull though." Which amended observation was certainly nearer the truth than the other, seeing that the weather was about as gray and cheerless as it could be without rain.

"As you say, rather dull. Pray can you inform me if what those people said just now is true about—about the times being so bad, I mean?"

"Well, I don't know—it don't make much difference to me either way. But I suppose they ain't very good. Not the best time for any body to be on the lookout for any thing, I'm afraid," added the young fellow, hazarding a shrewd guess at the drift of his interlocutor.

"And this fire they are all talking of seems to have made matters worse," said the man.

"Was it very bad, then?"

"There was never such a one in the town—not in my time at least."

"A gun-factory or something of that sort, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Belonging to a Mr. . . . Let me see, what did they say his name was?"

"Lee—Mr. Lee."

"Ah! Belonging to a Mr. Lee. Lee with an L and two e's?—there are so many ways of spelling it."

"An L and two e's—yes. Know any thing of him, sir?"

"I? Oh! dear no—not at all. But it is a sad thing, as he seems to employ so many work-people. I wonder if it can be true what they say about his being ruined."

"As to that I can't tell. Some say one thing and some another—one don't know what to believe."

"Just so, just so. Very sad for the poor work-people."

"Yes, very awkward for them. By the way, now I think of it, somebody told me he was going to pay his men for the tools they had lost, so that don't look as if he was quite done for."

"No, indeed—that's well said—no, indeed. And so he is going to pay his men for the tools they have lost? It is not every body who would think of that. He has the name of being liberal, I suppose?"

"He is very well thought of in the town. Why, I don't know how true it may be, but I heard that the very fellow who set the place on fire through his carelessness had been sent for along with the others."

"Indeed! He is not a man then to bear a grudge against any one? Not even when he has good cause for it?"

"Oh no! The last person in the world for such a thing, I should think."

"Ah! It can't be true that he is quite ruined?"

"I don't suppose it can. It's to be hoped not—it would be such a bad job."

"Very bad, very bad," said the man absently.

"Especially an account of the poor people out of work."

"Yes, that is what I mean."

The stranger fell into a reverie from which he was roused by a touch from his companion, who had meanwhile finished her meal and was ready to accompany him on his way. Their attenuated purse having been produced, and their scanty dinner paid for to its still farther attenuation, they went out, and once more found themselves in the street. Here for an instant they paused, holding another of their brief consultations.

"What is to be done now?" said the man gloomily. "You heard what they were saying?"

"I heard. What we have got to do in the first place is to find lodgings—I am not going to wander about like this all day and night, you may be sure of that."

"But the money . . ."

"Never mind the money; when it is spent we will get more, that's all."

"But . . ."

"We will get more, I tell you. Go on."

The man argued no farther, and once more they went forward through dingy lines of street that looked dingier still in the light of a leaden sky. Occasionally they stopped to inquire *after a cheap lodging*, and whenever they did so

another peculiarity was observable in their demeanor. They invariably addressed themselves to young persons.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MINNA CONVINCED THAT IT CAN NOT BE.

MEANWHILE the tidings of the great fire at St. Austin's, accompanied by exaggerated rumors of its extent and consequences, had spread all through the country for miles round, traveling as rapidly as only bad news can.

Among other places that it had reached was the village of Hollsworth, whence a few hours later Amy, having gone to do some marketing, brought it home to the farm-house. She had no suspicion that the Mr. Lee whose property was destroyed could be any thing to Minna, to whom she naturally related the news on her return, with all the embellishments which it had acquired on its journey.

"A million's worth of property burned down, and all uninsured—is it not dreadful to think of? That poor Mr. Lee—they say he has not a penny left in the world. I am so sorry, for he is a friend of Joe's and has been very kind to him—at least I suppose it must be the same."

Minna heard all without a word, though Amy, if she had noticed, might have seen her looking very pale. Presently, with a muttered excuse to Amy, she left the kitchen and stole up to her father's room.

He had gone up stairs with a book under pretext of wanting an hour's quiet reading, but Minna did not find him reading when she entered. He was seated at his window gazing out at the Black Moor, which, under the gray sunless sky that now overspread it, was looking more sullen and dreary than Minna remembered ever to have seen it before. But, sullen and dreary as it was, it seemed to have a fascination for John Haroldson.

Minna plunged at once into the subject of her errand; she was too much in earnest for circumlocution.

"I have just had very bad news. There has been a great fire at St. Austin's, and Raymond is ruined."

With an effort her father withdrew his eyes from the window and looked at her, but so dreamily that it was evident he had scarcely heard her words.

"Raymond is ruined. Father, do you not understand? I can not let him wait longer for his answer. If you will not write to him, I must—and tell him that if he were ten times ruined I would love him as well as ever, better than ever if I could."

He had heard now, and began to comprehend. A look of dismay overcast his face as she spoke.

"I promised I would do nothing without telling you," she went on, "and you see I keep my word. I have come to tell you that I am going to write to him at once."

"No, Minnie—no, darling—you must not."

"Don't be angry with me, but I must. I will be as dutiful as I can, dear father—I will never go away to leave you alone—but I can not let him think me cold or unkind. I must write; I can not help it."

"What! and tell him that you love him?"

"Yes, for it is true."

"You must not. My God! my God! how shall I prevent it?" he added in a lower voice, wringing his hands despairingly.

"Oh! father, why should you want to prevent it?"

"Why? why?"

His voice failed him as he repeated the word, and mechanically his eyes wandered toward the window.

There lay the Black Moor, with its scanty herbage and stunted furze-bushes, stretching desolately forth under a desolate sky—the monotony of the landscape grimly diversified in one direction by the ruinous houses of the deserted hamlet, and in another by a few decrepit posts remaining of the palisade which had once fenced the mouth of the fatal pit at the southwest corner. The scene was not one to raise drooping spirits, and John Haroldson shuddered as he looked.

"Minnie, you must think of him no more. There is a reason."

"What reason, father?"

"A reason. But I can not tell you."

"If you can not tell me, there is none. Forgive me, but I must write."

"No, no! — Minnie, stay, I will tell you. Minnie, fifteen years ago . . . No, never mind that—I don't know what I said it for. What I meant was—what I meant was—was that if he is ruined, you must see yourself that it would be very imprudent to . . ."

"Father!" cried Minna indignantly.

To hear her father preach the cold-blooded worldly doctrines which she thought to have left behind her forever in Mrs. Fanshawe's drawing-room, was more than she could bear. To think that the sordid tyranny of conventional ideas should have followed her into her own chosen sanctuary! Was then unselfishness and magnanimity to be found nowhere save in Raymond Lee?

"Is that your reason? Then I despise it. And he too shall see that I despise it. I will not lose another moment."

She was hurrying from the room when her father called her back.

"Stay. I will tell you—I will tell you every thing."

"You have told me already," she said, pausing incredulously.

"This time I will really tell you—really this time. I must, I must," he added in a whisper as if to himself, and Minna saw something like a spasm pass over his face.

She came back with renewed tenderness in her looks.

"What is it? Are you ill? What have you to tell me?"

"I must. Sit down here at my feet—no, first lock the door. Minnie, do you think any thing could make you hate me?"

"Father, dear, dear father—how can you ask me such a thing?"

"You shall hear. Come nearer—nearer still. So, so."

* * * * *

An hour had passed.

The gray sky that overhung the Black Moor had grown grayer yet as the unseen sun descended slowly toward the west, but Minna was

still sitting at her father's feet, having hardly stirred since first he began to speak.

It seemed as though she had heard something which had stopped the very flow of the blood in her veins—so white and rigid were her features, and so immovable her attitude. The arguments to which she had listened, whatever their nature, must have been very convincing, for her pleadings and remonstrances had all ceased now, and not a word escaped her lips even of entreaty. Evidently John Haroldson had carried his point.

But he did not bear himself exultingly in his triumph. His head hung forward on his breast as though in deepest self-abasement, while his whole frame was as tremulous and quivering as that of one just released from the rack. After a while he raised his head slightly, and, breaking a pause which had lasted several minutes, said hoarsely—

"Minnie, can you kiss me?"

She rose and pressed her cheek on his for answer. The action seemed to bring relief with it, for she burst into tears and fell sobbing on his neck.

"Little Minnie—you love me still, I think?"

"Darling father, oh yes! so dearly!"

For some moments he held her to his heart, and both wept tears that were not all bitter.

Presently she looked up and said—

"Father, let us send him his answer to-night. He might be writing again else, and I know not how I should bear it."

"My little pet! You do not hate me, Minnie, but I hate myself."

"Hush, hush, you make it worse for me so. But he must know at once that we must think of each other no more. Let us write now; it will be over sooner. Where is your desk?"

He pointed feebly with his hand; his strength seemed almost exhausted by the emotions of the last hour. It was she who took the initiative in every thing, bringing him his desk, opening it, arranging the paper and pens—all with a calm energy of which shortly before she might have been deemed incapable. But her father saw her white bloodless face, and knew that she was wretched.

"Write, father dear."

"I can not. What could I say?"

"I will try and help you to think."

She sat down pen in hand, and together they framed a note in which Mr. Haroldson told Raymond that he had an insuperable objection to the proposed marriage, and that all thought of it must be given up from that day. The composition of this letter being finished and her father having copied it out, Minna silently read it through, and then said in a low voice every vibration of which was a new stab to John Haroldson's heart—

"I must put something to it myself. He will never believe that it is all over unless I tell him so. And what should I do if he were to urge me more? It must be ended at once."

In a few minutes the following lines stood written under those penned by John Haroldson:

"It is true. Every thing is and must be at an end between us. All that I have to ask of you is not to think too hardly of me, and to believe that I have a reason for what I do, not at-

terly despicable and unworthy. What that reason is you must not seek to know, but it is one which must prevent us from ever seeing or holding communication with each other again. Understand this—*every thing is at an end*. Farewell; the best I can wish is that you may forget me, and be happy with one who deserves happiness better than I do.

“MINNA HAROLDSON.

“I ask it as a favor that you will make no attempt to answer this.”

“As it would only increase my misery,” she had been going to add, but she remembered herself and stopped. He must not guess that she was miserable, or he would not be content to give her up without questioning her as to the reason, and how could she answer his questioning? So she left the sentence as it was—cold and dry and repellant.

She read the letter over again, and this time found it sufficiently adapted to its object.

“Yes, that will do. He will not wish to see me any more now.”

She spoke very quietly, but at the last words her voice broke down with a sob that was not to be repressed. At the sound a look of bitter pain came over her father's face.

“Oh Minnie, Minnie, see what I have done to you! The little darling whom I tried so to make happy! Why, when you were a baby, Minnie, it hurt me to see you cry, though the tears then meant nothing; and I was always the one to make you smile again, always. But now, now . . . Oh that temper of mine—that hot headstrong temper! It has cursed my life, and, worse than that, my poor Polly's life, and now your life. My wicked, wicked temper . . . How can you forgive me, child, I wonder?”

“Oh! father, do you not remember how much you have forgiven me?—You never forgot to love your Minnie, though she had forgotten to love you. Whatever I have to bear now is only a just punishment. But I shall never forget you again, father—I love you, and always, always shall.”

She kissed him tenderly, and he understood that she spoke as she felt.

“And now I must leave you for a little time while I go to the village with this letter. It is necessary that—that it should be received as soon as possible.”

Quietly, though with a trembling hand, she folded and sealed the letter, and then, taking it with her, went into her own room to prepare for her walk.

This room, like her father's, faced the Black Moor, and on finding herself alone she approached the window as if by instinct, and looked out. Not, however, into the little garden below, or she might have been in time to catch sight of a figure which at that moment was passing into the house; but far away toward the ill-omened landmarks—hardly visible now through the gathering dusk—that pointed out the entrance to the Devil's Coal-Cellar. As she gazed, she shuddered as her father had done when looking in the same direction, and yet for her as for him the weird landscape seemed to have a mysterious fascination. At last she came away from the window, and, hastily throwing on her bonnet and shawl,

left the room and began to descend the staircase, the letter to Raymond in her hand.

She was half way down when she fancied she heard the sound of voices, and as she turned the corner at the top of the last flight the twilight showed her two figures standing in the passage facing her—Amy's and another.

At first she supposed that this second figure must be Joe's, but in the next instant she knew that it was not so, and with an indescribable pang recognized—Raymond Lee. She longed to turn and fly, but she feared to attract his attention by making another movement, and, rooted to the spot with consternation and dismay, stood watching and listening with a beating heart, hoping to escape observation in the darkness of the staircase behind her.

“You were very kind to think of telling me, sir,” Amy was saying. “I do not know how to thank you for it. My sister is up stairs just now, but if you will step into the parlor I will call her down directly.”

She held open the parlor door, and was in the act of turning round to go up stairs, when suddenly she perceived the muffled figure that stood motionless on the landing.

“Oh! there she is coming down. Minnie, here is a gentleman who wants to speak to you.”

There was no help for it. Minna came slowly down, and found herself face to face with the man for whom the letter she carried was intended.

He was standing in the doorway of the parlor, and, the window being behind him, she could not see, his face, but he silently held out his hand. Again she had no choice, and trembling gave him hers. She felt his fingers closing round it with warm tender pressure, and strove to withdraw it, but his grasp was too firm for that, and gently yet irresistibly she was led into the room. In a moment more Amy, instinctively perceiving that the stranger desired to speak to her sister alone, had fluttered back into her kitchen, there to meditate on a very important piece of news which had just been communicated to her.

With the Black Moor stretching sullenly before them in the gray twilight, John Haroldson's daughter and Walter Lee's son found themselves alone together in the little parlor.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CLOUD BURSTS.

HE stood looking at her in the dim evening light, and, though she dared not raise her eyes toward him, she felt that his gaze was upon her, and trembled beneath it.

Presently she heard his voice—that rich full voice which had so often made music in her heart—and started as though it had come to her from the clouds.

“Minna, your sister says you have heard what has happened. I have come to you for comfort; you will give it me, I know.”

She made an attempt to say something, she knew not what, but her parched lips refused to articulate, and no sound came.

Her silence and her pale face together showed him that she was more moved than he had ex-

pected, and with a lover's inconsistency he set himself to give her the comfort which he had come to seek.

"My love, my Minna, why do you let this grieve you? It does not grieve me—except for your sake. With you to love me I am strong enough to do battle with any amount of misfortune. It will not be long till we have fought our way through this."

She felt that she must speak now, if only to put an end to her own agony. Every tender word he uttered was a separate torture to her. But what could she say?

"Yes, Minna, we will conquer it, be sure."

"You will conquer it, I hope," she answered in a low voice.

It was done now! Surely he would understand what was meant by the rejection of that expressive "we," which sounded so musical when addressed by him to her.

But no! he had not yet understood, and only looked at her with eyes of loving inquiry. It was necessary to explain herself.

She drew from under her shawl the letter written that evening.

"I was just going to send you this. Will you please read it?"

He looked surprised, but took the letter, and went with it to the window. She heard him break the seal, and then sank down on the sofa behind her, unable longer to support herself. He was reading. What would he think of her as he read?

One moment and then another passed of intolerable suspense, and at last amid dead silence she ventured to steal a look to see how he was affected by what he read. But she could not distinguish his face—merely the outline of his head and shoulders darkly defined against the gray evening sky; and she could only guess from the rigid immobility of his attitude how fixedly his attention was riveted on the paper before him. What thoughts of her were passing in his mind just then? She knew that they were such as must cause him infinite suffering, and yet, though she felt as she gazed that he was dearer to her than life, she had no word to say by which that suffering might be softened. She withdrew her eyes, not daring to look longer, and waited.

She had waited for what seemed an age, when at last she heard the faint rustling of paper: and presently his voice, sounding from the window, said—

"What is this?"

She looked up again. His face was turned toward her, though she could not read its expression in the dusk, and he held the letter in his outstretched hand.

"Have you not read?" she asked feebly.

"I have read that you wish every thing to be at an end between us. Is that so?"

She could not trust herself to speak, but bowed her head in the affirmative.

There was a long pause, during which she again heard the rustling of paper, and then came the brief question—

"Why?"

The question of all others which she feared—the question which she knew not how to answer! She remained silent for a moment and then stammered forth—

"My father will not give his consent."

"What is his objection?"

"He—he has a prejudice . . ."

She stopped, feeling that by such answers she was only laying herself open to farther questioning. And if he questioned her farther, what should she do?

But she soon found that there was no danger of the persistent cross-examination she had feared. It was some time before he spoke again, and when he did, it was only to say quietly—

"I had not expected to find that my change of fortune would have had this effect on you."

How! was *that* what he thought? He imagined that her love had been mercenary! The imputation caused her a thrill of pain that stung her out of her resignation at once. She clasped her hands together, and cried wildly—

"Oh no, no! it is not that—it is not that. For the love of Heaven believe me, it is not that."

He had made a step toward the door, but came back as he heard her words.

"Not that? Thank God." He paused, and then the quick flash of joy seemed to die away, and he asked doubtfully—

"What made you write that letter? Did any one force you to it?"

"No. But—but I told you my father would not give his consent. I can not disobey my father."

He looked at her in silence, and she felt that his look was incredulous.

Perhaps it might not have been so if he could have seen the pale misery of her face as she sat before him, but it was too dark now for him to discern more than her figure. He suspected her, as he could not help suspecting her. And yet she had just assured him that his suspicions were unfounded, and only an hour ago he would have said that no amount of evidence could make him doubt her word. But then an hour ago he could not have counted on the bitterness which may be caused by sudden and chilling disappointment, and Minna had just dealt him the severest disappointment of his life. He had been so confident of receiving loving welcome and consolation, so sure that the only effect of his misfortune on her feelings would be to give them new courage to show themselves! and now to find her silent, reserved, cold—above all, to be told that he must think of her no more . . . No wonder if he grew bitter under the pain of such a blow, and bitterness must always be suspicious.

"Your father will not give his consent! You were not always so particular about your father's consent. Did you ask your father's consent to your marriage with Lord Fitz-John?"

"I—I have changed since then." She felt how shabby the evasion was, but any thing was better than to let him think she had loved him only for his money. Any thing indeed except the truth—that would be worst of all. "And besides I have promised my father, and my sister too, to take her place as his companion. I must not break my word."

Raymond remembered that she had indeed given such a promise, and straightway the mystery of her conduct was, as he fondly hoped, explained. Her father, in his eccentricity, or it might be madness, had conceived a violent prej-

udice against him (Raymond could easily believe that, remembering the circumstances of his former visit here), and had refused his consent to the marriage. Without that consent Minna—so long as she was bound by her promise to live with her father in Amy's stead—could of course do nothing, and had had no choice but helpless submission. This, and no other, must be the explanation of all that had perplexed him; none else was possible.

As it occurred to him, he became in the same breath jubilantly hopeful and vehemently self-reproachful. He was going to have Minna for his wife, but how should he ever pardon himself for having doubted her even for an instant?

"Minna, forgive me; I have been a fool, but I understand now—it was that promise that bound you. I have good news for you, love; it need bind you no more. You will not have to take your sister's place, for your sister is not going away."

Minna felt her blood run cold in her veins. Then all the conditions were fulfilled under which she had yesterday told herself that Raymond would have a right to claim her in despite of her father's opposition. And if she denied that right, as she must deny it, what could he think? The last poor pretext of compulsion was taken away from her—he would never believe now but that she refused him of her own free-will.

"Oh! it is true, Minna—you need not doubt it. I saw Joe Pullyn this evening before I left; he told me that the Ceylon business had been got rid of, and that he had just received an appointment promoting him to a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year. I said I had business at Hollsworth, and he specially charged me to bring the good news to your sister. Minna, what do you say now?"

She could say nothing at first; she felt that all her arguments had deserted her. Alas! what cruel news this was to her which had been so pleasant to Amy!

"Minna, what do you say?"

"My father—my father has forbidden it," she faltered at last. "And you know—you know . . ."

"You must not sacrifice yourself and me to his caprice," he burst forth passionately. "Your father does not need you, and he has no right to keep you only to make you miserable. Oh! Minna, Minna! you know how I have counsoled you before—believe me now when I say that in this you do not owe him obedience. You are mine, and none shall keep you from me without a reason. Darling, you are mine."

He approached her with a look of unutterable love. She had not power to speak, and he was about to take her hand when she drew it suddenly back with a shrinking movement which he did not fail to notice.

His hand retreated almost as quickly as hers had done, and he stood before her erect and rigid, his tenderness frozen in a moment.

"You too refuse me then—you as well as your father?"

She could have fallen at his feet and told him that she loved him better than light and life; but, as one may have the courage to plunge a deadly weapon into one's own heart, so had she now the courage to answer—

"Yes."

For some moments he stood transfixed with silent horror.

Horror—there is no other word to express his sensations in presence of the discovery which he deemed himself to have made.

Minna had never loved him, he thought; she was incapable of feeling real love for any human creature; and, worse than that, she had willfully practiced a base fraud upon his credulous affection. Confused and dizzy though he was, the recollection of what he had so lately heard from Mrs. Vesey came back to him with marvelous distinctness, and in an instant there crystallized itself in his mind an irresistibly plausible theory for explaining all in Minna's conduct that had perplexed him. Lord Fitz-John, for some reason best known to himself—possibly in resentment of the arts by which he had been entrapped—had chosen to break off his engagement; she had then bethought herself of the rich man of business who had already made a fool of himself about her, and decided that he might do in default of better. But first it had been necessary to bring him back again into her toils; and for this a bait had been chosen specially adapted to his eccentricity. He had reproached her with worldliness and told her that she ought to go home to her father; thus, when she wanted to recapture him, she professed to renounce the world, and went home as he had advised. The *modus operandi* had been perfectly plain and easy—as easy as lying—so easy that it might almost be called straightforward. All had been acting, nothing but acting—the penitence, the promises of amendment, the trembling, the smiles, the blushes Yes, even that letter to Joe had been probably written on the calculation that it would find its way to Joe's friend; she knew of their friendship without doubt, though she had been so innocently surprised to hear of it. How she must have laughed at the gullibility of her dupe! how she must have enjoyed her success until that untoward accident of the fire came to spoil her game! And even now that she was obliged to drop her mask, the language of deceit came so naturally that she could not quite give it up. She would like to make him think, if she could, that there was no connection between the change in his fortunes and the change in her views; nay, for an instant had almost succeeded in making him think so.

Such was now his explanation of the mystery, and as it formed itself in his brain, he looked on the drooping figure before him with an intensity of scorn which he had never yet felt for mortal thing.

"You will soon be going back to Mrs. Fanshawe's now," he said at last, breaking a solemn silence of which it seemed to him that the occasion was altogether unworthy. "It is a pity you came to such a mean home as this to please me."

She uttered a faint murmur of pain. He thought she was beginning to exculpate herself by farther falsehood, and was only the more determined to let her know that she was detected.

"Yes, you see I understand it all. I have found out at last why you came home, though I was dull enough not to guess it at the time. I suppose I was the only person in the town who did not, just as I was the only person in the

town who believed that you had of your own accord given up Lord Fitz-John. And I did believe it; I really did—the imbecile that I was. Why, do you know I actually put myself into a passion with the people who said you had been jilted, actually took the trouble to contradict them—after all my experience of you. But I understand now—oh! you have been true to yourself, admirably consistent throughout. Worldly, always worldly to the core!”

Minna writhed in her very soul as she listened to these accusing words, but she made no answer; she had no answer to give. She saw how fatally complete the case against her was, and felt herself utterly powerless to rebut it. Here was terrible retribution for past faults and follies! If she had never pledged herself to a lord for the sake of his title, if she had never made herself the slave of wealth and station and social opinion, Raymond might have believed her word now against all appearances. But he appealed to his former experience of her, and she felt herself perforce silenced. Remembering what that experience had been, she could not complain, she could not even wonder.

For some seconds there was silence. Perhaps he was waiting for her defense. But she uttered no word, and only sat looking on the ground in helpless, hopeless misery. Presently she heard him move abruptly, and in an instant more his hand was on the door. He was going away, believing her the falsest of created beings—going away forever. She would never see his face again or hear the sound of his voice, and when he thought of her it would only be with scorn.

Nature could hold out no longer; she forgot every thing in excess of pain, and involuntarily there parted from her lips in a passionate cry the word—

“Raymond!”

In a moment he was back again by her side, bending over her in a transport of tenderness.

“My love, my love! what have I done? what have I said? It was false—all false—I knew it even at the time, but a devil was tempting me. Oh Minna! you love me, I know. I could not love you so well if you did not. Forgive me—I have been mad—I thought you said what you did not—forgive me, and tell me that you will be my wife. Oh yes, you will, you will!”

He bent forward to kiss her as he spoke, and she felt that his kiss and his restored love, if she might accept them, would translate her into a seventh heaven. But at that moment a vision of the gray bleak landscape without rushed into her memory, and she shrank back shuddering, put her hands before her face, and cried in a voice of horror—

“No! Oh! go, go—for pity’s sake go.”

He recoiled a pace or two, almost reeling with the confusion that raged in brain and heart.

“You tell me to go? I thought just now you wanted me to stay. Which is it to be?”

“Go—Oh go at once!” she exclaimed piteously. She felt her strength rapidly deserting her, and was fearful that if he did not leave her quickly she might do something to betray herself.

Once more she heard him approach the door, once more she heard his hand on the lock, and this time she made no attempt to recall him. All hope, even instinctive and unreasoning hope,

was for the time frozen out of her heart; and she resigned herself to the worst, even to be hated and despised by Raymond Lee. Mute and motionless, never raising her eyes from the floor, she sat and listened. She heard him open the door, she heard it close after him; she heard his footstep in the little passage, then more faintly on the gravel walk outside; she heard the garden gate swing on its hinges, and presently heard his footstep again, now sounding from the road—heard it again and again, each time less and less distinctly, until at last she listened and there was nothing. He was gone forever!

She had borne till she could bear no more, and here her suffering found temporary cessation. Her head fell wearily backward on the sofa cushion, the pulsations of her heart grew feebler and feebler, and for a time all was mercifully made a blank to her.

When shortly afterward Amy, having heard the visitor depart, ventured to peep into the parlor, she was aghast at finding her sister lying in a deep and almost death-like swoon. She might not have been so eager as she was to restore the patient to consciousness if she had known what a blessed thing unconsciousness just then was.

CHAPTER XL.

UNDER THE DEAD WALL.

RAYMOND came away from Black Moor Farm with a soul as dreary as the dreary evening scene of barren earth and darkening sky which he looked on, or rather which he might have looked on had he chosen. For just then he recked nothing of externals; he might have been wandering through a garden of roses bathed in morning sunshine without receiving any pleasant impression into his spirit. All was dark and lowering and hopeless within, and it mattered not what there was without.

Once before he had parted from Minna in something of the same mood—when he learned that she had engaged herself to a man whom he knew she could not love. But whatever feelings of gloom and despondency there had been in him then were as nothing to those which oppressed him now. In the interval he had known a perfection of happiness which he had never known then and had only vaguely dreamed of. He had received the assurance of Minna’s love, had been accepted as her affianced husband, had been able to restore her to a pedestal in his estimation even higher than that from which she had lately fallen.

Nor was even this all that rendered the second blow far harder to bear than the first. The discovery he had now made, or thought he had made, was intrinsically infinitely worse than the former one. That had gone no farther than to show that Minna was cold, calculating, and worldly—this proved her foully treacherous as well. Before, she had only sunk to the level which he assigned to half the young ladies of St. Austin’s; now she had become positively vile, and all things became vile with her. It was a fault doubtless in Raymond’s character, this proneness to judge all mankind by the shortcomings of one, but such a fault is common to almost all whose experience of the world is limit-

ed. And (though here, it must be admitted, was another fault) Raymond's experience of the world had been limited by pride or shyness to almost nothing. So now, because Minna had been found wanting, all creation seemed a blot to him—all was darkness and ugliness and corruption.

Not that he was at that time capable of expressing for himself a tenth part of what has here been expressed for him. All faculty of thought appeared to have deserted him as he left Minna's presence that evening. He could not think, but could only dimly feel—dimly, for even the capacity of feeling was benumbed and blunted. The pain he had just endured had stunned him, as it is mercifully provided that all pain beyond a certain point must stun; and though he was conscious that something had happened to spread darkness and desolation through his life, he scarcely knew yet what that something was.

By a combination of chance and instinct (for he hardly thought of where he was going), he retraced his way to the village railway station, and took his place in the next train for St. Austin's; and, when he had arrived there, directed his steps by the same combination to his own house.

The night had quite fallen now, and it was well that it had, for any one who had seen and recognized him might have inferred from the moody apathy of his look and manner that his business misfortunes had turned his brain. But in the darkness of a more than usually dark night he was able to pass through the busiest streets of the town unheeded and unremarked, and turned into the quiet strip of road where his house was situated without having found himself once accosted.

It was a quiet strip of road certainly, if ever there was one—as quiet as a country lane, and yet wital as dingy as a town street. For combining the disadvantages of town and country, surely never was there a situation more felicitously adapted. It was deserted and damp and solitary to an extent that was quite rustic, and yet for volumes of smoke and expanses of brick wall it might have vied with the smokiest and brickiest of city neighborhoods. The very existence of such a road was an anomaly to any well-regulated understanding, especially since, practically speaking, it led to nowhere, and was scarcely used except by a few workmen. Its existence, however, like other anomalies, had a primal cause, having originated in a right of way claimed by the public across the pleasant river-side fields which within the last half century have been changed by the rising commerce of St. Austin's into sites for factories and work-yards. Huge tracts of the latter, shut out by high brick walls from the view of the passer-by, skirted the road on each side, except only where a slice was taken out of them for Raymond's house. This stood a little way back from the road, being surrounded by a dreary imitation of a garden, scarcely greener than the smoky waste from which it had been redeemed. The garden was entered by a massive iron gate, looking about as lively as the gate of a prison, and surmounted by a lamp which at night furnished the only light to be seen in the road from the one end to the other. A quiet strip of road unquestionably.

Toward this solitary light Raymond mechanically made his way, and having reached it, as mechanically drew a key from his pocket and put

it into the lock. He put it into the lock, but before he had time to turn it, he heard a voice near him whisper—

"Mr. Lee!"

And at the same moment he was aware that a man had started from the shadow of the wall into the lamp-light, and was standing close by his elbow.

At another time so sudden an apparition might have startled him, but, after what had already happened that evening, he would have been inclined to treat a thunderbolt falling at his feet as a quite ordinary occurrence. He did not therefore feel surprised, or even interested, and only glanced slightly round to ask indifferently—

"What is it?"

"Mr. Lee, is it not? I want to speak to you."

"I can speak to no one to-night," said Raymond impassively, and as he spoke he turned his key, and endeavored to enter.

If the gate had been less ponderous and rusty than it was, he would have passed in at once and probably heard no more of his strange interlocutor that night; but, as it was, a momentary delay ensued which gave the man time to speak again.

"It must be to-night. I can not wait. For God's sake let it be to-night. Stay!" And with the last word Raymond felt a hand grasping his arm.

The grasp was not a muscular one, and it would have been easy for him to shake it off, had he chosen. But its very weakness constituted in some sort an appeal to his forbearance, while there was a ring of anxious supplication in the man's voice so different from what might have been expected from the mere mendicant bully, that, in spite of his preoccupation, Raymond could not help being struck by it. He stopped in the act of opening the gate, and turned round with the question—

"What are you, and what do you want?"

For a moment there was dead silence. At last the answer came, slowly and with apparent effort—

"I am your father."

Raymond drew away his arm with a start of horror.

A few seconds before his apathy had appeared complete, but these terrible words seemed to find their way straight to his heart, stirring it with as sharp a pang as though it had never known pain or surprise before. His father—the father who had disappeared so entirely as to be long ago counted dead, the father whose disgrace he had thought so lately to have succeeded in burying—was his father come back at this crisis of his destiny to add old shame to new ruin and misery? He could not answer—could only rivet his eyes on the man's face who had spoken thus, and gaze as though he could never take them off again.

At first the difference between the reality which his senses now showed him and the image which his memory had retained almost reassured him. The stranger lied, or he himself dreamed. Raymond remembered his father as a well-formed comely man in the prime of life, with curly auburn hair, a clear-complexioned, almost blooming, face, rather too much inclined to fullness about the otherwise symmetrically shaped mouth and chin; and a protean manner that could at will be boisterously jovial or freezingly hard and

incisive—the former development being reserved for the hours of good-fellowship, the latter for family use and for the edification of those whom he wished to impress with an idea of his business talents. What Raymond saw before him now was a shabby shrunken-looking creature with grizzled locks, stooping figure, sallow cheeks, compressed hungry mouth, and a manner of nervous deprecation which looked equally incapable of ever having been either jovial or incisive. And yet there was something about the face which made it seem familiar to him.

"You know me now?" said the man at last.

And the voice, hollow and almost unnatural though it sounded, confirmed Raymond's worst fears. It was indeed his father.

Raymond moved his head slightly in answer; for the time he could do no more. The shock made him feel giddy and helpless; and when the man whom he now was forced to recognize as his father took once more hold of his arm, he offered no resistance, and yielded himself passively up as though vanquished by superior force.

They began slowly to pace to and fro under the shadow of the high brick wall, the elder man still resting his thin hand on Raymond's arm, partly perhaps for support, partly, it seemed, from an uneasy fear of letting him escape. Two or three turns were made in silence, but at last Raymond felt a tremulous motion in the hand that held his arm, and presently heard the hollow voice say—

"Raymond, I have given you no cause for gratitude. You must have suffered much by my means, I know. I have done you great wrong."

Raymond was mute, but in his brain there arose a turmoil of thoughts and memories strangely contrasting with his external immobility.

Yes, truly he had suffered much by the means of the man at his side—so much that filial duty might well be held abrogated. He looked back, and saw the mother he had loved living and dying in patient sorrow and humiliation, his own life cursed by the horrible consciousness of social inferiority which had made him shrink from human companionship and had soured an originally healthy nature. He looked back farther still, and saw in the memories of infancy and boyhood nothing to soften his feelings toward the father who had brought such tribulation on his manhood. He remembered hearing people remark to his mother what good company Mr. Lee was—really the most amusing person at a dinner-table they had ever met; and he remembered the same Mr. Lee as he was at home—cold, hard, and sarcastic, exacting in his wants, unnoticing of those who ministered to them, feared by his wife, unloved by his son. Cause for gratitude indeed! But still Raymond was mute. The man was his father, and since he could make no other answer than a bitter one, he would make none.

The other seemed to understand the reason of this silence, for he heaved a short sigh, and went on in a voice half querulous, half apologetic—

"No, you do not like me, I see that—it was what I had to expect. But I think you might almost be sorry for me, Raymond, if you knew what I have gone through. I behaved very badly about that money, I know; but it is all gone now,

every farthing—indeed it is, (apparently he regarded this as in some sort an extenuating circumstance). I have been in dreadful want lately—oh! nobody knows what want I have been in—and I have been ill too, terribly ill."

He coughed a hoarse sepulchral-sounding cough; and though it was voluntarily produced in attestation of his words, no one could hear it and doubt that disease was really at work.

"I had a fever on first landing in America, and have never been properly myself since. It is there I have been all this time, living first in one town and then in another—wherever I thought myself safest from being taken notice of. Oh! it has been a wretched life—you would be sorry for me if you knew. And now I have nothing left—absolutely nothing."

He looked wistfully at his son, and paused. But still Raymond made no answer. He was thinking of the past, and was unconscious of the present.

"I will tell you every thing, Raymond. A few months ago, when I was in great distress and feeling very ill, I happened to come across a St. Austin's newspaper that an emigrant had just brought out; and I read in it that your uncle had died and left you the business—that you were a rich man, in short. And I thought that if I could only get to see you, you would surely do something to keep me from starving, for whatever I may have done, I am your father, you know" (the last words in a deprecating whisper).

"It made me very anxious to come; I began thinking of the old country and the old place night and day almost, and it seemed to me that if I could only make my way back I should get well and strong again directly. And so I believe I really should have done, if she—if I, that is. . ."

He stopped, as if for breath, and coughed two or three times, looking round him the while with a nervous shudder.

"But now that I am really here," he went on in a husky whisper, "I am worse than ever. If—if any body were to tell who I am, you know! So many people here must hate me; if I were found out, they would put me in prison at once. I should not like to die in a prison, Raymond. But you will not betray me? you will do what you can to save me, will you not? Eh? Will you not?" he repeated plaintively.

"Yes, what I can," said Raymond, breaking his long silence for the first time. "God knows I would not have you be discovered for all the world."

No, not for all the world. The mere idea of the danger suggested by his father's last words had sent a cold shiver through his veins. An hour before, he had thought that the possibilities of misfortune were exhausted for him; but in the chance of the family dishonor being revived by his father's detection and arrest, he saw a new misfortune that would add a tenfold sting to all that he was already enduring. What would Minna say? Would she not be more thankful than ever for having washed her hands of so undesirable a connection? It was childish of him, perhaps, to be so much moved by so small a consideration, but he could not help it. The notion of Minna hearing that his father and his father's shame lived, galled him to the quick.

"But thank Heaven, there is no danger," he continued, answering himself rather than his

companion. "Nobody knows that you are here, and I myself hardly recognized you. There is no danger."

"I hope not, I hope not," said the father anxiously. "But I must get away from the country again at once, and I can if you will but help me. Raymond, I have told you how poor I am, and it is true; the voyage has swallowed up every thing, and I am all but starving. Give me money enough to keep me for a year or two—it may be all the time I shall want it for—and I will go back to America by the first ship. Two or three hundred perhaps; you will easily spare it."

"It is a pity you did not come a day earlier," said Raymond bitterly. "What would have been easy yesterday is not easy now, and if you want any thing from me you must wait for it. My place was burned down last night, and I am not far from being ruined."

"Yes, yes, I heard something about that, and if there were another soul in the world I could turn to for help, I would not trouble you; but there is not—you know there is not. Don't make me wait, Raymond; while I am in this place I am in danger, horrible danger—you do not know, but it is so. For God's sake don't make me wait."

He spoke with such vehemence of entreaty that Raymond would have complied at once had compliance been in any way within his power. But just then the money at his command was reduced to a few pounds which he carried in his purse; so that a longer or shorter interval of delay was absolutely unavoidable.

"I am sorry for it, but I must find the money myself before I can let you have it. You must wait—at any rate for a day or two. You have taken lodgings somewhere, I suppose!"

"Yes. But it is hard to have to wait—dreadfully hard. Who knows what may happen in the mean time?"

"For my own part I don't see that any harm can happen if you are reasonably careful. Give me your address; whenever I receive the money myself, I will let you know, and you can meet me here the same night to have it paid over to you."

"Paid over to me, that's right—into my own hands, you know. Don't let there be any trusting of money to letters or messengers, eh, Raymond? Into my own hands."

"Certainly. I never thought of any thing else."

"That's well. If any body guessed I had so much given me, why, I might be robbed perhaps. And I am in danger enough already, danger enough. Oh! how very hard it is to have to wait!"

"Why, what is it that you are afraid of?"

The father looked about him hurriedly, and then answered in a terrified whisper—

"If any one were to inform against me, you know."

"Yes, yes, but then who is to inform against you?" retorted Raymond, impatient of such degrading cowardice.

"Hush!" cried the other, clutching at his arm, "hush!" Again he looked round with quick suspicious movement, and then answered in a calmer tone—

"Oh! nobody—of course nobody."

This was the third or fourth occasion since

they had been pacing to and fro together on which Raymond had noticed his companion look round thus, and this time he instinctively looked round too. As he did so he thought he saw something moving in the shadow of the wall on the other side of the road. Doubtless a chance passer-by, he supposed, and congratulated himself on the night being so dark. He made another turn in company with his father, and on coming back to the same place looked again, expecting that this time there would be nothing to see. But to his surprise there certainly was something.

"Do you see any thing over there?" he asked presently. "I could almost fancy that someone was watching us."

He turned toward his father as he spoke, and was a little startled to find him apparently already looking in the same direction.

"Some one watching us—what an idea! No, I see nothing—nothing whatever, I assure you. Come, Raymond, let us turn; if we stand still in the cold, I shall be laid up with my asthma again. How chilly the nights are here, to be sure! Come."

"Not before I know what this is," said Raymond resolutely. "Wait here a moment till I find out."

He was about to cross, when he felt his father's fingers tighten desperately round his arm.

"No, don't; why should you? This way, there's a good boy. Come, come, what's the use of it all? she is doing us no harm."

She! Raymond had not yet been able to distinguish whether the object he saw moving in the darkness yonder was man or woman, but here was his father using the right pronoun without hesitation. The right pronoun, for now that the hint had been given him, he was almost sure that what he saw was a woman's dress.

"You know her then?" he demanded sternly. "Who is she?"

"I know her, do you say? Why, what put that into your head? I to know her indeed!"

The words were accompanied by a ghastly imitation of a laugh, but Raymond knew from the pressure of the lean fingers which clasped his arm that the speaker was trembling from head to foot.

"I ask again, who is that woman? Tell me at once, or I go and put the question to herself."

"Oh no, no! for Heaven's sake, no. Come a little farther, Raymond, dear Raymond, and I will tell you the whole truth. Only she must not hear."

They moved on a few steps, but the question had to be repeated before any information was forthcoming.

"Who is that woman? She can not hear us now."

"Can she not? So much the better. But she has quick ears, and quick eyes too—oh! you have no idea how quick they are."

"Indeed! You seem to know her well. Who is she?"

The answer came presently in a low humiliated voice—

"I wonder you ask me. I thought you would have guessed."

Raymond did guess now, and a qualm of horror and disgust came over him. He remembered that a woman's name had been coupled

with his father's as the probable accomplice of his guilt and sharer of his spoils.

"Emma Underwood?" he asked, muttering the syllables between his clenched teeth.

"Yes. Raymond, don't be angry."

But Raymond could not help being angry. He thought of his pale patient mother, and his blood boiled with indignation at the shamelessness which had dared to bring that woman within sight of his mother's son.

Walter Lee seemed to understand something of what was passing in the younger man's mind.

"Don't be angry," he repeated in quavering tones; "I give you my word of honor it's not my fault. If you knew what that woman was to me, you would pity me. I hate her," he whispered, and clenched his teeth as fiercely as Raymond had done before.

A cold look of surprise was the only answer.

"Ah! but I do—you would not wonder if you only knew. I tried to get away from her—tried hard—it was one of the reasons that made me so anxious to come back here. And I nearly succeeded too—that I did—I was on board the steamer for Liverpool before I knew that I had not. But she was on board too; she had found out what I wanted to do, though at the time she had pretended to think I was only going out for a walk. And when the vessel started, and I fancied myself free, there she was on deck, standing before me. I knew then there was an end of the happy life I had thought to lead. I should have been happy, I am sure—I had repented of all that was past, and the voyage and the English air together would have made a new man of me. But there she was on deck standing before me."

He paused, and wiped from his brow the perspiration which had gathered there at the recollection thus conjured up.

"She has kept by me all these years to spend my money (how she made it fly!), and now that she has done that, she keeps by me to eat my last crust and drink my last drop. She will never leave me while I have bite or sup left—unless it is to rob me. She would rob me if she could, I know—she tried once. Oh! you need not wonder why I hate her."

It was very plain that he did hate her most cordially.

"And now that I am here, where she knows a word would send me to die in prison, she is more of a tyrant than ever. That is why I want to get away again; there is no telling what she might do if she took it into her head. She follows me about everywhere like my shadow, to see that I don't escape. I would if I could, but it is no use to try—she would only have me locked up; she is always threatening it. And it would be so dreadful to die in prison, Raymond. You think me a coward, I dare say, but I can't help it—I'm not the man I was."

He shivered as he spoke, looking altogether such a wretched abject creature with his sunken cheeks and quick-coming breath that it was impossible to see him without a feeling of something like compassion.

"I will do what I can to help you," said Raymond. "I have a trifle about me just now which you shall have, and in another day or two you shall hear from me. What is your address?"

"5 Paradise Place," answered the father, men-

tioning a shabby street in one of the poorest quarters of the town (it is a remarkable circumstance that streets with the prefix of 'Paradise' generally are shabby). "Direct to Mr. James Allen, if you please—that is the name I am known by. I will make no bad use of what you give me, Raymond," he continued deprecatingly. "I will not indeed. Only let me get out of this accursed country again, and she shall see that I won't be her slave any more—oh! it will be quite different. But I can't help myself here—I am bound hand and foot. If you only knew how I hate her!"

"We will say no more about that. Here, for the present, is all that I can give you."

With trembling hands Walter Lee produced his meagre purse, and Raymond poured into it all the contents of his own—a few sovereigns and some loose silver.

"There's a good boy. You won't let me wait long for the rest, will you? What should I do if she were to betray me?"

"And what should I do?" Raymond thought bitterly. "But surely there can be no danger."

"You shall not wait long," he said aloud. "Meanwhile it seems to me that you are terrifying yourself very unnecessarily. If she is what you say, she will understand her own interests a great deal too well to execute her threats."

"I dare say you are right—I am sure you are—it is what I think too sometimes. Only I can't keep myself from feeling uncomfortable—it is very foolish, no doubt. Then you will send for me when the money is ready?"

"Yes. And when you have it, you will leave the place at once?"

"Next day, next day—and forever."

"Very well," said Raymond, drawing a long breath. "Have you any thing more to say just now?"

"No—only to thank you for all your kindness. I think I had better go now—she will be wondering what we are saying, and the night air is always bad for me. Good-night—I have not deserved so much from you, I know."

"Good-night," said Raymond.

In a moment more he found himself alone, looking after his father's form as it retreated into the darkness.

He watched it crossing the road in the direction of that other sinister form dimly perceived, or rather divined, through the blackness of the night. There was a short interval during which he scarcely distinguished one from the other, and presently two dark figures emerged from the shadow of the opposite wall, and with crawling stealthy steps traversed the patch of light cast by the lamp above the garden gate. Raymond could not discern the faces of either; but, knowing whose figures they were, he shuddered, and, as though under the influence of some evil spell, followed them with his eyes until he lost them in the darkness which seemed to be their native element. When they had thus quite disappeared, he opened his gate; and, entering the house as noiselessly as possible to avoid his housekeeper's curiosity, made his way to his study and sat down to think.

And so one of that pair of guilty outcasts whom he had just watched out of sight was his father!

The thought made every nerve tingle with

shame, and his brow grew scarlet even in the solitude of his own chamber. Surely here was the strangest freak of his strange destiny, and the cruellest. The father whose memory had been an incubus which oppressed him for years, but which latterly he flattered himself to have shaken off, had returned—not as a memory only, but as a horrible reality—to persecute him in the midst of his deepest adversity. There had been only one point at which, since Minna's desertion of him, he had been vulnerable; and that one point Fate had now singled out for attack. He had imagined that nothing could possibly make him more wretched than he was already in the ruin of his fortunes and his hopes, but here was his wretchedness doubled at one stroke. He thought of the chance—remote certainly, but still possible so long as his father remained in England—of discovery and exposure; and as he dwelt on the idea, he positively writhed under the pain which it gave him.

And yet perhaps that pain at that time was wholesome. It had at least the effect of rousing him from the desponding indifference into which he had been in danger of falling; it called into full exercise energies which might otherwise have been frozen out of him altogether; it gave him something to fear, and therefore something to hope. He had now an object to attain—to get his father out of England safely and secretly; and an object to attain is the grand antidote to despair. That night was a miserable one, as it could not fail to be; but instead of spending it, as he might else have done, in a state of blank stony apathy, he occupied himself with eager calculations of the probable day and hour of his father's departure.

The process of healing had commenced in his spirit.

CHAPTER XLI.

A WALK ON THE MOOR.

LITTLE thought Raymond in his wretchedness that Minna was more wretched still than he.

And yet, though he guessed it not, thus it was. He suffered in thinking her base, but she suffered far more in knowing that he thought her so. Not even the prospect of eternal separation from the man she loved, and whose betrothed wife she had so lately held herself, gave her half so sharp a pang as the consciousness of being deemed by him false and unworthy. The first was a once inflicted wound, of the kind which time and resignation may gradually heal; the second was an abiding, daily and hourly repeated torture, the pain of which was renewed each time she thought of it. On recovering from her swoon and from the semi-stupor which for some hours it left behind, she was racked by the ever-present remembrance of Raymond's parting reproaches, by never-ceasing speculations as to what new reproaches he might even then be uttering against her in his heart.

In spite of all her endeavors, so much mental anguish could not fail to show itself by external signs more or less visible. For the sake of her father and Amy she did her best to conceal it, and in a day or two forced herself to move about the house as usual under pretense of being almost well; but she was pale, listless, and evi-

dently miserable. Her father saw it, and, knowing what and how irremovable was the cause of her grief, suffered almost as much as she did herself. Poor John Haroldson! the radiant joviality with which he had been so overflowing during the first few hours of Minna's return, and which had culminated in that joyous game of Pope Joan, had been wofully short-lived. All had disappeared now, and a gloom had fallen upon him darker than any to which in his darkest moods he had been hitherto subject.

Even Amy, though laboring under the disadvantage of seeing every thing through a rose-colored atmosphere pervaded with an idea called Joe, could not help discovering that her sister was unhappy.

The affectionate little thing was intensely sympathizing, but her sympathy did harm to its object rather than good; not from any defect in its quality, but because her imperfect knowledge of the real circumstances of the case often betrayed her into striking a chord whose vibration would cause Minna the most exquisite pain. As she could not be informed of the whole truth, it might have been better could she have been kept in complete ignorance of what had caused her sister's illness and manifest grief; but that had unfortunately been impossible. Minna's swoon immediately following the visitor's departure, the name of Raymond once or twice murmured as she was regaining consciousness—every thing proved that Mr. Lee was in some way connected with what had happened. Amy was not so inexperienced but that she could scent a love affair when it was so unmistakably suggested, and Minna had judged it best spontaneously to confess to something of the sort. But all that Minna said was that there had been an engagement between Mr. Lee and herself, terminated on the evening of his visit by an unfortunate misunderstanding. In pronouncing this last word a tremor had made itself heard in her voice which enlisted Amy's feelings on her side with a vehemence quite extraordinary for so demure a little personage. And in proportion as Amy was sympathizing for her sister, she was indignant against Mr. Lee—expressing her indignation with a warmth which she could not always repress even when she saw how much Minna was pained by it.

"I can't forgive him," she declared (making the remark for the third or fourth time) one afternoon as the sisters were strolling together on the moor for their first walk since the evening of Minna's illness. "Dear Minna, you are looking so pale and ill! Oh! I can't forgive him. You may say what you like, but I am sure he must be a cruel, hard-hearted, fickle . . ."

"No, no," interposed Minna, who felt every word of reproach rebound from Raymond on herself, for was it not thus he might at that moment be thinking of her? "Don't say any thing more about it, please. It is not his fault—I do assure you it is not his fault."

But Amy was as unconvinced as ever.

"I am sure it is not *yours*," she protested energetically. "Oh! do tell me, dear Minnie, can not I or Joe do something to make it up? Joe and Mr. Lee are great friends, you know, and Joe would go through fire and water to serve you, I really believe. You ought to hear how he speaks of you sometimes. Can't he say something?"

"Not for the world," cried Minna hastily. "Amy, for Heaven's sake, promise that he shall not say a word. If I thought he was going to do such a thing, it would kill me."

"It must be as you wish, of course," said Amy with a sigh. "But I can't bear to see you looking so; it makes me wretched. Oh! you need not shake your head. I know you have not been happy since that horrible evening, and I don't either, for I am sure if Joe and I were to quarrel, I should be just as bad. But we should make it up again directly, I know—why shouldn't you make it up again too?"

But Minna could only shake her head once more, and murmur with white lips that it was impossible.

"What! and is it always going to be like this? Oh! it is dreadful to think about. And you so good and noble and generous! I'm sure if any body deserves to be happy, you do. And he must know it too—of course if he knows any thing at all about you he must know that."

"Amy, don't!" cried Minna faintly.

The last words had been as a dagger plunged into her heart. Alas! how very different was the knowledge which Raymond thought he possessed of her!

"Well, I won't then, but it is terrible to see you so unhappy. I almost feel as if it was wicked of me to be happy myself, and yet I can't help it sometimes. Joe is so good, you know," pleaded Amy apologetically.

"That I am sure he is," emphatically said Minna, "and you would be very ungrateful if you were not happy—and very happy too. Tell me, dear, she went on quickly, fearing that Amy was about to revert to the old subject, "tell me, how far are we from home now? It looks to me as if we had been wandering on a good way, have we not?"

"About three quarters of a mile," said Amy, looking about her. "I know it by those bushes you see over there to the left—they grow near the pit-hole. That's the place I always look for when I want to know where I am. Do you remember the pit-hole, Minnie?"

"The pit-hole!" faltered Minna.

"The Devil's Coal-Cellar, they call it sometimes. Oh! surely you have not forgotten."

"I—I remember something about it. Are we near it now?"

"It is close by those bushes yonder, where you see the two broken posts—they are part of the old fence. Would you like to go and look at it? it won't take more than two or three minutes."

Minna looked toward the bushes and shuddered, yet seemed unable to take off her eyes, and after a short pause answered slowly—

"I think I should."

"This is the way then. Thank you, Minnie dear, I like you to take my arm. But you are not tired, I hope?"

"No. Never mind me, please. What a beautiful afternoon!"

"Is it not? You see even our poor old Black Moor can look well sometimes. I am so fond of seeing the sun shine on the yellow furze. And then if we have no trees, we have so much the more blue sky to look at. We are getting very near now."

"Indeed!" said Minna.

"You will see the hole in another minute. But I am afraid the walk has been almost too much for you."

"Oh no! not at all."

"You are sure? Look, we begin to see where it is now. Shall we go close up, or are you afraid of being giddy?"

"I am not afraid. We will go close up, please."

The girls went forward, but very cautiously, for Amy felt her sister's hold tighten upon her arm, and fancied that Minna was afraid of being giddy after all.

The scene at the mouth of the Devil's Coal-Cellar looked far other to-day—with a bright blue sky overhead, and a warm summer sun lighting up the green tufts of grass and nettles which lined the sides of the abyss as far down as the eye could reach—than it had looked on the wild night more than fifteen years ago when Captain Pullyn and his companions had passed this way seeking for John Haroldson. But while the place looked more treacherous for the smile that was on it now, it hardly looked less ghastly; and the silence of the two sisters as they approached and stood on the brink showed that even in day-light and sunshine it had something of the same gruesome-ness which it possessed in darkness and storm.

Amy was the first to speak.

"It is a horrible-looking place, is it not? I forget how deep they say it is—something tremendous I know, and I'm sure it looks as though it went to the very middle of the earth. I hardly wonder that they give it such a name—one can not help feeling that there is something bad about it. Don't you feel that too?"

"Yes," said Minna with a shiver, muttering the word almost as though she were speaking to herself; and Amy, looking at her with some surprise, saw her gazing down into the cavernous blackness with straining eyes that seemed endeavoring to fathom its secrets.

"I see it interests you just as it does me, Minnie. I know what you are thinking of—you are thinking of what happened down there once. Only fancy, how dreadful to . . ."

Amy was proceeding to expatiate on the fate of the unfortunate colliers who had met their death down yonder in the darkness, when suddenly she felt Minna lean heavily on her arm, and, once more looking up, saw her ashy pale and apparently on the point of fainting. She drew her back from the chasm almost by force, exclaiming—

"Minnie, Minnie, you must not look any longer—come away directly—it is dangerous. Are you better now?" she asked, when they had left the pit a few paces behind them and turned their faces homeward.

Minna moved her head faintly in the affirmative.

"You frightened me so—you can't think. Do steep places make you giddy? Then you must take after father—he can't bear steep places. At least he never will go near the pit-hole, and that is the only thing of the kind we have in the neighborhood. He thinks it so dreadfully dangerous—he seems to get quite uncomfortable if he only hears that I have been by it. We had better not mention perhaps that we have been there to-day; it would only make him nervous. You won't forget, will you?"

Forget that her father did not like the Dev-

il's Coal-Cellar? No, there was no danger of that.

"Dear Minnie, I never saw you look so ill. It makes me quite vexed with myself for having taken you to that place. But I have so often been there by myself without feeling frightened, and you told me you would not get giddy . . . It was very naughty of you, Minnie."

"I did not think I should be so foolish," stammered Minna. "It is because I have not been well for the last few days, and am a little tired with my walk, perhaps."

"How selfish of me to let you go so far!" said Amy, self-reproachfully. "And you always accustomed to go about in a carriage, too. Oh dear! no wonder you are tired."

The simple little country girl did not know how hard the life of a fashionable fine lady, even with a carriage, may sometimes be; and Minna almost smiled at her ignorance.

"And after standing about so long this morning, helping with the breakfast-things, and the beds, and I don't know what else besides! Though that isn't my fault," added Amy, pathetically—"you *will* do it, you know."

"It does me good, dear," said Minna.

"That's what you always say, but I can hardly believe it. It is so different from any thing you have been accustomed to."

"It is all the better for that."

"Ah! you say that because you are so good—you try to fancy so, I know. But when I think of how we live here, with every thing about us so plain and quiet and old-fashioned, and how you used to live at Aunt Fanshawe's, with those beautiful rooms and lovely dresses, and the balls and the parties . . ."

"Amy, Amy," remonstrated Minna with an attempt at playfulness, "you are not beginning to sigh after those things, I hope?"

"I!" cried Amy, shrinking back at the mere suggestion. "No indeed, I should not know what to do with them if I had them. But then I have never been used to them, you see. You have lived among them all your life; and when I think of that and see you looking so sad, I say to myself sometimes that no wonder Minnie is not happy at home."

"Amy, you must never say that again—not even to yourself. Remember, whether I look sad or not, I am ten thousand times happier in my own dear home with you and father than if I had stayed at Aunt Fanshawe's."

This declaration—made so emphatically that Amy could not help believing it—was altogether true. Minna did not miss any of the things she had left behind her at her aunt's.

It might be rash to say that under other circumstances she would not have suffered more or less from the sudden withdrawal of some at least of the minor luxuries to which she had been accustomed, and on which custom makes one so dependent. But, as it was, she had been since coming home at first too happy, and afterward too miserable, to pay any attention to their absence. On the other hand, she was conscious of having found one luxury that was not minor, a luxury of which mental sorrow did not tend to make her less, but on the contrary far more, appreciative—the luxury of being genuinely and unselfishly loved by those about her. The love of her father and Amy did her unspeakable good,

while the want of a maid to dress her when she wished to be dressed, or of a carriage when she wished to go out, made no impression on her at all, except indeed that it was a wholesome distraction to her thoughts to be obliged to do things for herself which she had been accustomed to others doing for her. In the same way, it was a wholesome distraction to her thoughts to give such assistance in the labors of housekeeping as she could prevail on Amy to accept. Of course there was no trace left now of the exquisite delight which during the first day of her return she had found in watching and learning the various domestic operations necessary to the carrying on of a household; but she felt that she made herself of use, and in the sense of being useful there is always something sustaining and invigorating.

She was indeed infinitely happier at home (less unhappy would perhaps be the more correct expression) than, with the same cause of grief to rankle in her heart, she could possibly have been at Mrs. Fanshawe's.

At Mrs. Fanshawe's she could not have had the consolation of seeing the raptures of Amy and Joe, and this was a spectacle which it would have done any body good to witness. They were both so happy, and both so utterly unable to conceal their happiness—Joe betraying himself in extra glossiness of costume and complexion and extra awkwardness of manner, and Amy in preternatural efforts to look as if she didn't know there was such a person as Joe in existence. They were to be married as soon as a modest house which Joe had taken at St. Austin's could be fitted up with proportionately modest furniture; and the bride's outfit was already in active preparation. It was astonishing how much more interest Minna was capable of taking in that simple trousseau than in the costly one which had been got ready for herself, and what efficient help (considering her inexperience) she managed to render with her needle—another pleasure which she would not have found at Mrs. Fanshawe's. Then at Mrs. Fanshawe's she would have missed the occupation which at this time gave her more comfort than any other—that of trying to support and cheer her father under the blow which had fallen upon them both so heavily. The confession he had made to her on that gloomy gray evening had not estranged them from each other, but rather drawn the bonds between them closer; and when she was not assisting Amy in the housework or the manufacture of bridal finery, she was almost always with her father—reading aloud, or describing experiences of her past life, or otherwise endeavoring to minister to his entertainment. It was pleasant to feel that she could increase his sum of happiness by her love and her companionship, and pleasant still to feel that at last she was doing her duty—that duty which if she had been willing to do before, Raymond's good opinion of her might not have been wholly forfeited in spite of appearances. Possibly with time and patience she might partly redeem that good opinion even yet.

But though this hope and the consciousness of doing her duty gave her strength to suffer, they hardly made the poignancy of her suffering less. Day after day passed, and notwithstanding the assiduity with which she applied herself to occupations far different from any to which she had been accustomed, notwithstanding her endeavors

to appear cheerful, it was only too manifest to her father and Amy that she had sunk into a depression from which neither their efforts nor her own could rouse her. Even a very important piece of news which reached the farm-house about ten days after her last interview with Raymond—pleasantly fluttering Amy's spirits and even exhilarating John Haroldson's—failed to excite Minna to any thing like rejoicing.

CHAPTER XLII.

MR. BOARDMAN.

THE news referred to was brought one morning by a tall, spare, solemn-looking gentleman in black, whose very appearance in the neighborhood of the farm-house would in itself have been incident enough for any ordinary day.

But this was destined to be a great deal more than an ordinary day, and instead of merely making his appearance in the neighborhood as a bird of passage, the solemn-looking gentleman paused at the garden gate, opened it, and actually walked up the garden to the house. Here he paused again, and knocked a loud double knock, quite regardless of the circumstance that the front door and the door of the kitchen beyond were both wide open, and that from where he stood he commanded a full view of John Haroldson reading the papers and the two girls shelling peas. It was not until he was invited to step in that he apparently judged himself entitled to take official cognizance of the group, which he did by duffing his hat and twiddling a bunch of massive seals which hung by his side. Then he stepped in accordingly, and Minna immediately recognized him as Mr. Fanshawe's family lawyer.

She was greatly startled, and for an instant relapsed so far into her old self as to be violently ashamed of the pea-shells, and to consider if there was any possible mode of furtively slipping off the brown holland apron she had put on for the occasion. But in the next moment her new self had triumphed, and she raised her eyes boldly to the visitor's face, feeling, or endeavoring to feel, a serene conviction that shelling peas was as honorable an occupation as netting purses, and that there was as much native dignity in a holland apron as in a silk one.

She soon discovered, however, that the newcomer, though including her in a polite general bow with which he commenced operations, was not disposed to give her any special recognition as a former acquaintance. He had seen her scores of times as Miss Fanshawe, but now he treated her exclusively in the character of an unknown Miss Haroldson. She was vastly relieved. Whatever his business might be, it was evidently not to negotiate her return under her aunt's roof, while at the same time his manner was so unusually affable that she could not suspect him of hostile intentions.

"Hem," he began, looking round with another general bow and another twiddle of his seals. "I have to apologize for this intrusion, but . . ."

At this juncture Amy had the presence of mind to offer the visitor a chair.

"I have to apologize for this intrusion, but—a—the fact is—a—I have called on an affair of business. I ought to begin by stating my name

to be Boardman, of the firm of Boardman & McVellum, solicitors, of St. Austin's. I presume I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Haroldson of Black Moor Farm, and the two Miss Haroldsons?"

John Haroldson, looking very much astonished, answered "Just so;" and Mr. Boardman bowed himself into the acquaintance of the family, including Minna, with great ceremony and entire apparent unconsciousness of having met any member of it before.

"Delighted, I am sure. Hem! My object in calling this morning is one of a gratifying, though at the same time of a melancholy, nature. Let me see, I believe I have omitted to state that I have the honor of being Mr. Fanshawe's legal adviser."

"Indeed!" said the farmer, looking more astonished than ever, and putting out his hand to take Minna's in instinctive defense of his paternal rights.

"Yes, and it is to that fact that I now owe the pleasure of making your acquaintance. Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe inform me that there are circumstances (here the speaker glanced toward Minna not severely, but significantly) which preclude them from holding direct intercourse with this branch of the family; and yet an event has just occurred which renders some communication absolutely indispensable. Of that indispensable communication I have now the happiness to be the medium."

He paused, and cleared his throat grandly, regardless of the visible suspense of his audience. Then he slowly drew forth a fat pocket-book, and carefully selected from its multifarious contents a letter inclosed in a black-bordered envelope, which he did not open, but continued to hold in his hand to the end of his discourse, as though it were a fossil specimen he was lecturing on.

"Mr. and Mrs. Fanshawe have had very afflictive news this week. I allude to the intelligence which they have received of the decease of Augustus Hilton, Esquire, of Sarra-warra, South Australia, in the sixty-third year of his age."

Neither Minna nor Amy had ever seen the person whose death was thus announced to them, but they both knew him by name as their uncle, their mother's only brother, who, in consequence of a quarrel with their father, had become estranged from her soon after her marriage. He had never taken any notice of them in his life, beyond sending his love once or twice to Minna in her capacity of his other sister's adopted daughter; and they could not help feeling some surprise that it should have been thought necessary to acquaint them so speedily with his death. As for John Haroldson, it is to be feared that the news was rather a relief to him than otherwise, he having had a vague notion that the lawyer had come to disturb his possession of Minna.

After a decorous pause, during which his hearers were supposed to be surmounting the first anguish of their bereavement, Mr. Boardman continued, with a gentle sigh—

"To return to matters more exclusively pertaining to business. It appears that the late lamented Mr. Hilton died intestate—an undesirable course to pursue, as I can not but consider, especially in a case like the present, where land-

ed property to the value of forty thousand pounds and upward is concerned. However, the fact is as I say. Mr. Hilton died intestate."

He looked very hard at Minna and Amy as he spoke, but they evidently were not very clear as to what dying intestate meant.

"Under these circumstances the property, as you undoubtedly perceive (Minna and Amy had perceived nothing of the sort), becomes divisible among the next of kin, namely, the two sisters of the deceased or their representatives. That is to say, one moiety devolves on Mrs. Fanshawe, and the other in two equal portions on the young ladies whom I have now the honor of addressing, as representing the deceased Mrs. Haroldson. A bid of forty-two thousand pounds has just been made for the property by a highly respectable party on the spot, so there can be no doubt as to its being worth fully that amount. I beg leave to offer the Miss Haroldsons my warmest congratulations."

He waved the letter gently in the air, and, having now done with it, replaced it among the documents in the fat pocket-book with the same elaborate care which he had displayed in selecting it.

Meanwhile father and daughters sat looking at each other in mute amazement. Such a piece of good fortune had been so utterly unexpected by any of them that it actually took away their breath. They had known that they had a relation in Australia, unmarried and reputed to be rich; but at the time of his quarrel with the Haroldsons he had expressed himself so bitterly that they had never dreamed of benefiting by his death, taking for granted, as indeed Mrs. Fanshawe had done herself, that all his property would go to the sister with whom he continued on friendly terms. And here were the two girls suddenly declared heiresses to the amount of more than ten thousand pounds apiece—a sum which to Amy was prodigious, and seemed scarcely less so even to Minna, according to her altered ideas of the value of money. The news was absolutely overpowering.

The lawyer allowed his hearers a few seconds to recover themselves while he was apparently absorbed in the arrangement of his papers, and then, politely ignoring the effect he had produced, went on in the driest and most matter-of-fact way imaginable.

"It is needless for me to point out that where joint action is necessary a common understanding is likewise indispensable. May I inquire the address of your legal adviser?"

He drew forth a pencil and held it hovering over a fly-leaf of his pocket-book, repeating blandly—

"The address of your legal adviser—your lawyer, in fact?"

The farmer looked uneasily, first at his daughters, and next at the questioner, and then answered deprecatingly—

"We haven't got one."

But Mr. Boardman still kept his pencil suspended over the paper.

"Excuse me, it is necessary that you should name some professional gentleman to whom the young ladies are willing to confide the management of their interests in this business."

"Whom shall I say?" asked John Haroldson helplessly.

"That is a point on which I can not presume so much as to make a suggestion. Though, as a friend, I would point out the extreme importance of withholding your trust from any but a respectable firm. Also it is not to be denied that there would be a certain convenience in—a—a—such entire jointness, if I may be allowed the phrase, such entire jointness of action among the different branches of the family as would result from the personal unity of their legal agents, but it must be understood that I am offering no opinion."

The farmer was more puzzled than ever, and so was Amy, but Minna came to their assistance.

"I think Mr. Boardman means that if we wish it, he will be kind enough to undertake the business himself, father."

Mr. Boardman gave a slight start of surprise.

"If only you would, sir," said John Haroldson imploringly.

The other considered a little, and at last decided that he could not say he was prepared to decline a request so strongly urged by Mr. and the Miss Haroldsons. Then Mr. and the Miss Haroldsons expressed their gratitude, and a great many reciprocal bows were exchanged, and the pencil and pocket-book were put up, and a card bearing Mr. Boardman's professional style and address produced in their stead: and ultimately the lawyer went away, with renewed congratulations to his fair clients and a promise to communicate with them again very shortly.

Great was the commotion he left behind him among the family group which he had found so quietly and peacefully pursuing its daily avocations. On two of its members, the master of the house and his youngest daughter, the effect was decidedly pleasurable. In spite of his gloom and low spirits, John Haroldson was too good a father not to welcome a change of fortune which assured a future of ease and comfort to his daughters: while as for Amy, though a little frightened at so much wealth, she was undeniably pleased with it. She could have gone on all her life without once complaining of being poor, but she could not help finding it very pleasant to be rich, especially as now she would be able to make Joe rich too. And then she rejoiced not only for herself and Joe, but for Minna, who would now be able to live more in the style to which she had been accustomed, and would assuredly find scores of wooers far worthier of her than that Mr. Lee who had used her so badly. Oh! altogether it was quite delightful.

Poor Amy—it would have spoiled all her happiness both on Minna's account and her own if she could have known that the news which to her seemed so good had but added fresh bitterness to her sister's grief.

Yet so it was; while Amy was rejoicing with her father, Minna was alone in her room weeping over her heiress-ship as over a new trouble.

"He will hear that I am rich," she groaned in her spirit. "And then what will he think?—what can he think?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

MINNA AND HER MONEY.

Two or three days after Mr. Boardman's visit at the farm-house, Joe Pullyn, calling there one evening as usual, received a great surprise. Not but what, between his own recent promotion and the windfall which had just come to his betrothed, he was getting used to strong sensations; still this experience was of a kind for which former ones had not prepared him. On the preceding occasions it had been Fortune which had startled him, but this time it was his future sister-in-law.

On the evening in question, when he entered the little parlor where the family always took tea now, he found Minna sitting alone with a piece of needlework in her hand. This was nothing new, but it struck him as rather peculiar that when the first greetings were exchanged, instead of going to call Amy as usual, she resumed her seat (it was turned from the window so that he had only an indistinct view of her face), and plunged into conversation with no allusion to the fact of Amy's existence.

"Pray sit down, Joe. You are quite well this evening, I hope?"

"Pretty well, thank you," said Joe, seating himself nervously, and wishing with all his heart that Mr. Haroldson or Amy were present to keep him in countenance. For though Minna had nowhere a more devoted friend and servant than Joe Pullyn, he had by no means as yet surmounted his original awe of her. Not Amy herself admired Minna's good qualities, real and imputed, more than Joe did, or would have gone through more to serve her; but whereas a course of daily and hourly intimacy had enabled Amy to prattle to her sister quite freely, Joe, seeing her more rarely, had not yet quite learned to regard this new member of the family as an equal. Thus when he discovered that she intended to honor him with a *tête-à-tête*, he felt nearly as much gratified, but withal nearly as much perplexed and put out, as though he had suddenly found himself alone and helpless in the presence of Royalty. But she went on with the most embarrassing condescension, apparently quite unconscious of his uneasiness.

"And your father, Joe? Are we not to have the pleasure of seeing him this evening?"

"Yes, I think so. I looked in upon him as I came along; he was busy mending the old summer-house, but he said he would come after tea."

"We shall be very glad to see him. He is quite well then?"

"Pretty well, thank you."

"I am happy to hear it. It is very fine out of doors, I suppose?"

"Oh! quite beautiful."

"So it seems. And all your other friends are quite well, I hope?"

"My other friends, Miss Minnie?"

"Every body whom you know, I mean," explained Minna, bending down her head to look at her work.

"I think so," said Joe, sorely perplexed. "At least I have not heard of any one being ill."

There was an awkward pause, and then Minna, bending her head still farther, asked in a low voice—

"Have you seen any thing of Mr. Lee lately? He is a friend of yours, I believe?"

Joe was thunderstruck. He had heard something about an engagement and a quarrel between Raymond and Minna—that is to say, he knew what Amy knew, neither more nor less—but he had heard nothing to prepare him for being taken into Minna's confidence on so delicate a subject. Yet even in his astonishment he felt himself gaining new courage. This implied confession of ordinary human weakness seemed at once to bring Minna down to his own level. And then he knew that she must be more embarrassed even than he was. So he replied, with less awkwardness than he had hitherto shown, and even with an idea of endeavoring to reassure her—

"Yes, I'm glad to say he is a friend of mine. And it is my honest opinion that he is the finest fellow in the whole world."

He was determined that it should not be his fault if the quarrel was not made up again, and was prepared to uphold Raymond's merits against all contradiction. But Minna took no notice of his declaration, either in the way of assent or dissent, and went on in the same low voice—

"That fire did him a great deal of harm, I believe—nearly ruined him, I heard at the time. Can you tell me how his affairs stand now?"

Though it never occurred to Joe to imagine that Minna asked this question from an interested motive, he was a good deal surprised by it notwithstanding, and paused a moment in sheer astonishment before answering.

"Not over well, I'm afraid. But he is bearing up like the brave fellow that he is, and I shouldn't wonder if he pulls through it after all. He has been too busy for me to see much of him lately, but I can tell you he is not going to let himself be beaten by his troubles if he can help it, and has set to work in the right spirit."

"I am glad of that," said Minna, speaking very softly, as if to herself. Then, addressing Joe again, she asked—"He is going to carry on the business, I suppose?"

"Yes, if he can, but that's just the question. I dare say he may succeed, but there's a deal of difficulty in the way."

Minna made three or four stitches in silence, and Joe began to think that her interrogations were exhausted, when suddenly she inquired—

"You have not told me yet what the difficulty is—want of money, perhaps?"

"Yes, just so," said Joe, greatly wondering.

"Then what exactly are his means?"

Such a question, asked by a young lady regarding a gentleman in whom she was supposed to take an interest, would surely have been almost irresistibly provocative of an ill-natured construction in the mind of a less guileless person than Joe. But with Joe Minna felt safe, and she was safe. He was intensely surprised and perplexed, but thought no evil, and answered with matter-of-fact simplicity and straightforwardness—

"The insurance office owes him five thousand. And I'm afraid that's pretty near all he has to go upon."

"And that is not enough for him to begin business again on, is it?"

Joe shook his head, and Minna resumed with a profoundly calculating air—

"There will be a great many expenses, of course. Let me see, the first thing is to get a new place for carrying on the works. He must make haste with that, or in the mean time he will lose his business."

"That's exactly where it is," said Joe, lost in wonder at the keenness of perception with which Minna foresaw and appreciated the necessities of the case—he might not have been so much surprised had he known how deeply she had pondered on it. "That's exactly where it is, and he is trying for a new place as hard as ever he can, but it's easier said than done. There's only one set of premises to be had in the town just now that would any thing like suit, and he is doing his best to get hold of them, but the worst of it is they are to sell, not to let, and, with the heaviest mortgage they'll bear, it will take more than he has to buy them. And then it isn't only buying the place he has to think of, but fitting it up, and setting things going, and materials and wages, and—and I don't know what besides. It's a bad lookout for him, poor fellow—I hardly see myself what's to be done."

"It is plain enough what is to be done," said Minna, stitching with tremendous diligence. "Somebody must lend him money, Joe."

She had been so practical and business-like in her remarks hitherto that Joe had hardly expected any thing so naïf, and took upon himself to enlighten her.

"Yes, that's all very well, and that's what he wants, but don't you see loans are not always to be had for the asking. Money is so tight just now, and then the mischief of it is, where's his security? Nothing beyond his own five thousand, that perhaps may be swallowed up in no time, except his name and the business goodwill. And as you said just now, Miss Minnie, all this delay is very bad for the business, and you may trust the people with money to lend for finding that out as fast as any body. Even if he could begin again to-morrow, with his old place built up as good as new, he would have lost a deal just by the news of the fire having got about. Why, to my own certain knowledge there are two first-rate contracts gone this very week to another firm that he would have been sure of else. So that it's quite a toss-up, you see, whether the business can ever right itself again."

"Oh yes! it will," said Minna confidently.

"It may if he can get somebody with money to think so, but I'm afraid there's no chance unless."

Again for a few seconds Minna stitched away as though her life depended on it, and then briefly asked—

"Suppose I were to think so?"

"You!" ejaculated Joe.

"Yes, I." She laid down her work as though she felt the occasion too serious to be longer trifled with, and looked earnestly into the young man's face. "Joe, I have a great favor to ask of you. Will you grant it?"

"Of course I will," was the vehement response. "What is it?"

Her eyelids fell, and, scarcely above her breath, she murmured—

"I wish to—to assist Mr. Lee, but it must be done so that he shall not find it out. Will you

be kind enough to go to him, and offer him in your own name as much money as you may find that he requires? You may go as far as nine thousand—I would give more, but I must not run the risk of being a burden on my family. You will do this for me, Joe, won't you?"

"Minnie!" cried the startled listener, calling her for the first time by her Christian name; but he never noticed this in the extremity of his amazement.

"The money will be ready as soon as I hear how much is necessary—I have arranged all that with Mr. Boardman. I went over to St. Austin's yesterday to see him, and he will advance me as much as I want. So there need be no delay, you see. You will be able to go to Mr. Lee to-morrow, I hope?"

"Do you actually mean it?" asked Joe, almost fancying that his ears must have deceived him. "What! lend nine thousand to Mr. Lee?"

"Yes, or give it to him, if you can get him to take it. I have no use for it myself. You will do me this little favor, will you not?"

"You are an angel!" cried Joe, with an audacity at which in a calmer moment he would have stood aghast. "Oh! Miss Minnie, I beg your pardon, but I can't help it. It is so kind, so generous, so splendid I may almost say. How grateful he will be to you, to be sure!"

"Joe, Joe, I am afraid you don't understand at all. Remember—he is to think the money is yours and Amy's. You are not to let him guess it is mine on any account."

Joe's countenance fell.

"Not? But why not? Oh! what a pity!"

"Not for the world. Mind, not for the world."

"Why not?" he persisted, gathering courage from the ardor of his sympathy. "Why not? It would put every thing right directly, and we should all be so happy. Oh! Minnie, do let me tell him, and all will be made up—only see if it won't be. Do, Minnie, do."

He had worked himself up into a state of extraordinary excitement, but Minna answered, with perfect calmness save for a certain quivering about the mouth—

"Joe, you must understand that—that whatever there may have been between Mr. Lee and myself is absolutely and entirely at an end, and can under no circumstances be renewed."

Joe stared blankly.

"What! wouldn't you make it up if you could? And you could—I am sure you could. If you would only see him again . . ."

"No, no, no. Joe, can't you believe me? It is just because I don't want to see him again that this must be a secret."

"It is by your wish, then, that . . ."

"Yes, by my wish. It is my wish that he and I should be henceforth strangers."

She uttered these words with such tranquil deliberation that Joe could no longer doubt that she was in earnest. Even the ashy pallor which overspread her face as she spoke, though it suggested that her decision was painful, only caused it to appear the more irrevocable by putting all idea of coquetry out of the question. She was not saying one thing and meaning another, that was certain. No, it was really her wish that she and Raymond Lee should henceforth be strangers.

But what a mystery of mysteries it was that, this being so, she should desire to make such a sacrifice for his sake! Even in the midst of the disappointment which it gave him to find so irremediable an estrangement between two persons toward both of whom he felt so warmly, Joe could not help perplexing himself over this enigma. What could it possibly mean?

"You understand now, I think, Joe. You will take care that he shall not guess—promise me."

"I promise," said Joe reluctantly, giving the pledge from pure inability to refuse any thing that Minna asked of him. "But oh! is it not a mistake altogether? Do pray think a little longer. If he was to fail, you might never see your money again, you know. I couldn't recommend it as an investment—I couldn't really."

"I am not thinking of it as an investment," replied Minna quietly. "Come, you said you would oblige me—you are not going to break your word, surely. You will call on Mr. Leo to-morrow?"

Joe sighed helplessly.

"If I must, I suppose I must. But . . ."

"Never mind that. And you have promised not to say a word to him about me?"

"Yes. But . . ."

"Very well, now that we quite understand each other, I will go and tell Amy that you are here. By the way, don't say any thing to her about this, please—it would only puzzle her."

Joe looked quite as much puzzled as it was possible for Amy to be, but Minna vouchsafed no explanation of her motives, and only added—

"You must not think that I am acting entirely without the knowledge of my family. My father knows and approves of all that I am doing."

Joe was more puzzled than ever.

"So you may give me my own way without scruple," she continued with an attempt at a smile. "And you will too, I know. Shake hands, dear Joe, and God bless you for all your friendship."

"God bless you too, dear Minnie," said Joe earnestly, as he took her hand with less of awe than he had ever felt for her. "Well, I will do what you wish, though I must say . . ."

"Thank you. And now I will call Amy."

In a few moments Amy entered, all blushes and confusion, and Joe and she were presently deep in the discussion of commonplaces which had no intrinsic interest for either of them, but which nevertheless afforded subject-matter for a delightful and intensely absorbing dialogue, carried on no less by looks than words. But even in the society of his betrothed, engrossing though he found it, Joe could not keep himself from sometimes speculating on Minna and the mystery in her motives and conduct. He made nothing of it, however; the more he speculated the less he could understand. His future sister-in-law was a riddle that he could not solve.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN INTERRUPTION.

THE evening succeeding that on which the above recorded conversation had taken place at *Black Moor Farm*, Raymond Lee was sitting

alone at his desk in his dreary house at St. Austin's.

He had spent much time at that desk lately, writing letters to agents and correspondents, making calculations of his resources actual and contingent, and otherwise laboring with might and main at the task of reconstructing his broken fortunes. For, as Joe had said, Raymond was manfully grappling with his difficulties. The shock he had received on learning that his father was alive and in St. Austin's, while arousing his fears, had likewise aroused all his dormant energy, and it had never flagged since. Out of his temporary apathy he had been electrified into new life—a life gloomy and sunless, but full of power for work and endurance. From the time when he had first exerted himself to ward off the farther disgrace with which his father's presence threatened him, all his former vigor seemed to have returned; and instead of yielding to the indifference of despair, his mind was teeming with plans for founding a new business which should be even more flourishing than the old one. If the world was false and hollow-hearted, for that very reason he would not let it beat him; he would fight and conquer, and Minna should see him conquer. She had done him mischief enough already, and should not have the satisfaction of thinking that she had destroyed his courage as well as his happiness. He would work his way upward, if only to show her that he had so much strength still left. Thus, in a frame of mind dark and bitter enough, but not the less favorable to energy and perseverance, he had set himself to consider and confront his difficulties; and the labor of beginning had increased his power for going on. But the task he had undertaken was a very hard one, and he knew it.

On this particular evening there seemed to be something on his mind which did not allow him to work with quite so much diligence as usual.

He was drawing up a long and complicated estimate, but interrupted himself every now and then to look at his watch, occasionally pausing for minutes together to ruminate on a subject evidently unconnected with that of his labors. At last, when the hands of his watch marked nearly ten o'clock, he rose and pushed his papers on one side, though his work was not half finished. Then from a secret drawer in his desk he drew forth a small bundle of bank-notes, which he carefully counted over and placed in his purse. This done, he took up his hat and made for the door. And yet the night without was dark and starless, and altogether uninviting for a stroll, while the work he left behind was enough to occupy him till the small hours of the morning.

Just as he was leaving the room a ring was heard at the garden gate, and with a gesture of impatience Raymond drew back to wait till the summons should have been answered. But the interruption was destined to be longer than he had foreseen, for presently a voice he knew was heard inquiring for Mr. Lee, and in another moment a familiar step sounded in the passage. The voice and the step were Joe Pullyn's, and immediately afterward Joe Pullyn himself was shown in.

"I have to apologize for being so late," began the visitor, who had evidently been walking very fast, and looked much flustered; "but this being

a busy night at the office, I really couldn't manage to come a moment earlier. How do you do, Mr. Lee?"

Raymond shook hands, and said "How do you do?" likewise, but could not help looking as though he wondered why Joe had come at all.

"I hope I'm not in the way," said the young man uneasily. "But there is a—little matter of business I want very particularly to speak to you about."

"Indeed! Pray sit down."

It will be seen that Raymond was not quite so cordial with his friend as formerly. This was partly because on this particular evening the interruption of a visit was unusually inopportune, but also, it must be confessed, because the scepticism of human nature with which Minna's conduct had inspired him shook his confidence in Joe as well as in the rest of mankind. And then, on other than general grounds, the poor fellow's society was no longer so acceptable to him as it had been. Though the name of Minna was never breathed between them, Raymond could not lose sight of the fact that Joe was her future brother-in-law, and he wanted to forget, if he could, all about her and hers. So that all things considered, it is to be feared that at this time he would not have been sorry if Joe had justified his bad opinion of humanity by ungratefully cutting him in the midst of his misfortunes.

The new-comer sat down as desired, feeling horribly nervous at the idea of the deception he was about to practice. He had been inwardly rehearsing his part all day, but that did not make it by any means easier to play now. The truth was, Joe was not a bit of an actor. But Raymond was waiting for him to speak, and it was necessary that he should make a beginning somehow.

"As I said, there is a matter of business I want to speak to you about. Yes, just so, a matter of business." He looked at the ceiling and then at the floor for inspiration, and, having probably obtained it, went on, tying knots in his pocket-handkerchief the while. "The fact is, I have called to ask . . . By the way, I don't know whether you may have heard of the piece of luck that has just come to Amy and her sister."

The last word was scarcely out of his mouth when Joe saw his friend move uneasily, and knew that he had struck a wrong chord.

"Really? No, I can't say that I have," replied Raymond dryly.

"A most extraordinary thing it is, to be sure. An uncle in Australia or somewhere like that, whom they hardly ever heard of, has just died and left them ten thousand apiece."

Raymond did not answer. He was thinking how glad Minna must be that she had not thrown herself and her fortune away upon a ruined man.

"So you see Amy is quite rich now," continued Joe, tying more knots in his handkerchief.

"So I see. A very fortunate circumstance, really—a rich young lady can always count upon a rich husband."

"But I am not rich, you know," said Amy's betrothed, looking puzzled.

"You! oh no, I to be sure not—I was thinking of the general rule just then."

"At least when I say I'm not rich," resumed Joe, suddenly remembering himself, "I mean just the contrary. For of course when Amy has

all that money, we shall both be very rich indeed. So rich that we shan't know what to do with it all," he continued, coming a step nearer the point.

"Oh yes! you will when the time comes. Rich people never think themselves too rich; you will soon find that out."

All this was not very encouraging for a shy young man, but Joe remembered his promise to Minna, and determined to persevere.

"I hope you won't be offended, Mr. Lee, but the fact is . . ."

He came to an embarrassed pause.

"Well?" said Raymond.

"The fact is, I have been thinking that perhaps—I hope you won't be offended—that perhaps a few thousands might be useful to you under present circumstances, and if so, you would be quite welcome to them. The money will be ready as soon as you like, for the lawyer has promised to advance it, and as the interest will be no object, I think that perhaps the arrangement might be as—as—in fact as convenient for you as for ourselves—eh, don't you think so?"

Raymond had let Joe stumble on to the conclusion of his speech simply because he had been too much touched to interrupt. In listening he had made the discovery that if there was no such thing as disinterested love in the world, at least there was disinterested friendship, and the discovery did him good. He put out his hand and wrung that of his friend with even more than the old cordiality, conscious of an uncomfortable swelling at his heart as he did so.

"God bless you, my dear fellow—I hardly know how to thank you for such noble generosity. But I would not take your money in any case, and as it is, I have no need of it. I have already secured a loan, or as good as secured it; the terms are all settled, and the money will be paid over as soon as I apply for it. Still I thank you all the same; I can not thank you enough. God bless you, Joe; God bless you over and over again."

"Don't mention it," said Joe confusedly, quite conscience-stricken at receiving acknowledgments to which not he, but Minna, was properly entitled. He saw that he was establishing a claim on Raymond's gratitude on false pretences, and felt almost as guilty as though he had picked his pocket. And yet Joe would have done a great deal for his friend, and if he, instead of Amy, had come into a fortune of ten thousand pounds, he would almost certainly have wished Raymond to benefit by it. "Don't mention it, pray. Well, if you don't want the money, of course you don't, and there is no more to be said. But if you find this loan you have bargained for isn't enough, or if there should be any hitch about it, I hope you won't forget that you have only to . . ."

"It is no good to speak of that," interrupted Raymond decisively. "Under no circumstances whatever would I take advantage of your kindness. But thanks, a thousand thanks—your friendship has done me more good than twice the money."

And indeed Raymond felt better and stronger for being able to believe that there was some good in human nature.

"But wouldn't you take it if you wanted it?" persisted the other, afraid that, if he were to take back such an answer, Minna might accuse him

of lack of zeal. "It will be a great disappointment, I am sure."

Raymond shook his head.

"It would be such a prime investment, you know," pleaded Joe.

But Raymond was inexorable.

"I hope it would not be a bad one, Joe, but the chances are too uncertain for you to stake your money on. Let hard-headed men of business who live by calculating other people's prospects make an estimate of mine, and lend me money according to what they think them worth; you are my friend, and as such disqualified for judging impartially. Besides, you have no right to invest your little wife's money in a speculation so hazardous as this would be. It is hers, and ought to be reserved for her benefit."

This was exactly Joe's own view, and, not being able to find arguments against it, he was obliged to remain silent, and gave up the point in despair.

A long pause followed, the younger man saying nothing because he had nothing more to say, and Raymond because he was uneasily calculating the flight of time, and pondering how to cut short Joe's visit without hurting his feelings.

"You must come and see me again very soon," he began at last with an embarrassed air, "and then I can ask you to spend a long evening with me. But to-night I have an engagement—engagements, I mean—which . . ."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said the intruder, rising in great hurry and trepidation. "I have been hindering you very much, I'm afraid. I'm sure I beg your pardon."

"Nonsense, Joe. It is I who have to beg yours for treating you so cavalierly. But I have work here that will occupy me for hours, and as I start for London by the first train to-morrow, it must be finished to-night."

"You are going to London?" asked Joe in surprise.

"Yes, but only for a day or two. I am going to try for a contract which I hear is in the market just now; if I can only get it, I shall have a capital starting-point to make my new beginning from. The worst of it is that I shall not be able to get things into working order again quite at once, but of course I shall make a lower estimate on that account. Wish me good luck, Joe."

"That I'm sure I do, Mr. Lee, from the bottom of my heart. I am very sorry to have hindered you."

"I shall work all the better for the interruption. You will come and see me very soon again?"

"I will try, thank you." Joe took up his hat, and brushed it with his coat sleeve while he added hesitatingly—"There is one little thing I should like to mention before I go . . . You always look well to your fastenings, I suppose?"

"I believe so. What makes you ask the question?"

"This is a very lonely situation, you know. And to tell you the truth, as I came in there was a man loitering about outside the gate in an odd kind of way, as if he was waiting for some one. He came up to me at first, but slunk away again directly. I did not much like the looks of it."

Raymond laughed—rather uncomfortably, but Joe did not observe that.

"A man! Waiting for some one! Pooh, what an idea! Good-bye, my dear fellow—don't forget to come again soon."

"Good-bye, Mr. Lee. You don't think anything of it then?"

"Of what? Of that? Oh nothing—what should I think? Good-bye, and God bless you for what you came to say to me."

The two friends—more friends now than ever—shook hands warmly, and then the visitor took leave, Raymond accompanying him to the door of the house, where, for some moments after Joe had disappeared through the garden gate, he stood gazing dreamily into the blackness of the night. He was about to re-enter the house, when the gate which had just closed was once more opened, and he found his friend returning toward him.

"Why, Joe, what is it? Have you forgotten anything?"

"No, only the man is still there—on the opposite side of the way now, but I crossed on purpose to look for him—and when I got a few steps farther I came upon a woman who seemed to be waiting too. I am sure they are up to no good."

Raymond laughed again—the same uncomfortable laugh as before.

"Nonsense, it is all a mistake. You must be dreaming."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Lee. I think I'll go and ask them their business."

"For Heaven's sake, no," cried Raymond, catching him nervously by the arm. "No, on no account—on no account whatever."

"Why not?" asked Joe, quite surprised at such unwonted vehemence.

"Why not?" repeated Raymond, constraining himself to speak more calmly, and even forcing a smile. "Why, simply because it would be utterly absurd. The people are doing no harm, and you have no right to call them to account for standing where they choose in a public road. As a favor to me, I beg that you will do nothing so silly."

"Do you think it would be so very silly?" said Joe doubtfully. "Well, I'm glad I came back to consult you. I was within an ace of doing it, only I thought it best to ask your opinion first. It would only have got me into a row, I dare say, for if I had once begun, I wouldn't have left off till I had found out all about them."

A cold perspiration started on Raymond's brow at the idea of the danger which had been so near to him without his knowing it. Good Heavens! if Joe *had* found out any thing about them, what would have happened? Joe, of all men in the world—Minna's future brother-in-law, who would be sure to tell her all he knew or suspected! Raymond trembled from head to foot as he thought of it.

"It would have been ridiculous, Joe, perfectly ridiculous. Promise me you won't say a word to them—promise me."

"Oh! of course not, now that you are so much against it. I wouldn't think of such a thing for a moment."

Raymond breathed freely.

"However, I'm glad I came back to mention it," went on the young man. "Forewarned, forearmed, you know, and there's nothing like

looking well after one's fastenings. Good-bye again, I'm afraid you think me a sad troublesome fellow."

"I think you my true and faithful friend, Joe. And God forgive me, but I did not know there was any one like you left in the world."

"I wish you wouldn't, Mr. Lee," said Joe, wincing as he thought of the fraud he had practiced on Raymond's credulity. "I'm no better than other people, and not so good, if the truth were known. But whatever I am, I wish you well from the bottom of my soul—I do indeed. Good-night."

Once more, after a cordial grip of each other's hands, the two friends parted, and with a full heart Raymond turned back into the house.

He was deeply touched by the proof of Joe's attachment which he had that night received—more touched than since Minna's desertion of him he had deemed himself capable of ever being again. And yet while his emotions this evening were far more genial and healthy than any he had felt of late, the cause which had called them forth had at the same time opened a new source of bitterness. It was pleasant to find that there were people in the world whose affection could survive a reverse of fortune, but the discovery increased the blackness of Minna's treachery. Others were true to him in his adversity, while his own Minna—she on whom his heart had been set as it had never been set on any thing before—had fled from him at the first tidings of it, proving that she had never cared for him, but merely for his reputed wealth. It was not universal human nature that was in fault, but only Minna—Minna who had been to him as the symbol of every thing that was good and pure and noble—Minna whom he had loved with all his powers of loving, and on whose truth, blind and infatuated as he had been, he would have freely staked his life. Thus, at the very time that he felt his heart open toward Joe, he felt it shut itself closer than ever against her.

Raymond did not remain long meditating thus. Two or three minutes only he lingered in his study, waiting until Joe should have had time to get beyond sight and hearing; and then, apparently quite forgetful of the unfinished estimate on which he had been working so diligently, once more took up his hat and turned to leave the house. This time nothing came to interrupt him, and in a moment more he had passed through the garden gate, and stood in the solitary road under the shadow of the dead wall.

CHAPTER XLV.

FATHER AND SON.

HE had not waited many seconds when he saw the figure of a man crossing the road toward him—cautiously, as though not wishing to venture too near before making sure of his identity.

"It is really you this time?" whispered a hoarse, tremulous voice—the same voice which had accosted him under that same dead wall more than a fortnight before. "I was near speaking to somebody else instead just now—somebody who was going into your house. It has made me so dreadfully nervous."

"I am sorry for that," answered Raymond. "But it is really I this time."

"At last!" said the other querulously. "I thought that perhaps you had not got my letter, and that you were not coming at all. I said ten o'clock exactly. And it is such a cold night for waiting—such a bitterly cold night."

He drew his threadbare greatcoat round him, and shivered. And yet, though now a slight autumnal chill began to make itself felt in the air after sunset, the night was by no means so cold as he seemed to think.

"I assure you I have come as soon as I possibly could. But I have been detained a few minutes by a visitor, and . . ."

"A few minutes! Yes, I dare say it only seemed a few minutes to you, but to me . . . Don't be angry, Raymond—I'm not what I was even when I saw you here before. This last illness has pulled me down terribly."

And indeed, as Raymond's eyes became accustomed to the obscurity, he saw that a marked change for the worse had taken place in his companion since they had met last on this spot. The sunken cheeks had become more sunken still, and the eyes looked larger and more restless.

"You didn't believe I had been so ill, did you? Ah! but it was true—I wouldn't have stopped in this cursed place an hour after you told me the money was ready, if I could have stirred out of it. This is the first day I have left my bed for a fortnight."

"I am afraid you are hardly fit for leaving it even yet," said Raymond, looking at the miserable man with more compassion than he had ever yet felt for him.

"Oh! but I am, I am—it will do me good. You have brought the money?"

"Yes."

"Good boy—the money to take me out of this horrible country. This is the only thing to cure me, and that will. While I stay here I am in mortal fear—no wonder I was ill, it is only strange I didn't die of it. How much? Say it in a whisper, please."

"Three hundred. It is all I can spare just now. If you should ever want more, you must write, and I shall see what I can do for you."

"Thank you—you are very good to me," the man said humbly.

"And on your part you promise to leave the country as soon as possible?"

Walter Lee almost laughed at the question.

"As if I would willingly stay in it a day! It is no fault of mine I am not across the sea by this time. I should have been if you had only let me have the money when I wanted it first. I dare say you could not have done otherwise, and it was not your fault, of course, that I took such a cold that night, but it was a great pity you could not—a great pity. I could have traveled the next day quite well, and if I had once got on board, it would not have mattered then whether I was laid up or not. It was a terrible pity," he concluded, in the peevish tone of a man who feels himself aggrieved.

"I could not help it. You will leave this place to-morrow then, I suppose?"

"To-morrow, yes, of course," was the eager rejoinder. "And England the next day—we shall be in time to catch the first steamer from

Liverpool. Oh! I have done nothing but look at the shipping advertisements all this week."

"You will be out of England then the day after to-morrow?" said Raymond meditatively. "That is well."

The prospect gave him infinite relief. So by the time he returned from his London journey all would be over, and he would again be free from the sense of danger which had oppressed him for the last fortnight.

"Yes, yes, I shall be safe by the day after to-morrow. The money, boy, the money."

He stretched his lean trembling hand greedily toward the purse which the younger man drew forth.

"Don't speak too loud, Raymond. Three hundred, did you say?"

"Yes."

"Good, good. Put them in here, please."

He produced a tattered old leather pocket-book, into which Raymond counted the notes with which he had come provided.

"Thank you, thank you—that does me good. You will fancy me a miser, I dare say, but it is not the money I care for—it is what it can do for me that I think about."

"You will keep it in a safe place?" said Raymond anxiously.

"Trust me for that. She shan't even know I have it. Oh! I have thought of a capital plan for hiding it from her."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. She would think nothing of robbing me, I believe, if she could; but she shan't have the chance. You don't know what that woman is capable of."

Raymond returned no answer; the subject was not one on which he could trust himself to speak.

"You wonder I have submitted to it so long—you think me a great coward, no doubt. But it is going to be all quite different—I am determined to make a change. I don't mind telling you; when once I get back to America, I intend to make a bold effort and shake her off forever."

And so he probably thought that he did intend, but the grandiloquent energy of the announcement was sadly belied by the manifest tremor with which he glanced round as he made it. He looked such a weak nervous creature both in body and mind! and weakness always seems more weak still when it blusters.

"Yes, I am determined, Raymond, quite determined. I shan't suffer what I have suffered any longer—not when I get back, that is, for meantime I must be very cautious. And I shall be. She little knows how cleverly I intend to manage."

Here a violent fit of coughing interrupted him, and Raymond asked—

"Had you not better go back now? The night air will make you ill again."

"No, no, it won't—I am not cold any more now. It is the money that has done me good, I suppose. Feel—I am almost too hot."

He laid his hand on Raymond's, and indeed it was burning; excitement had produced a strange reaction.

"You had better go back for all that; if you are to travel to-morrow, you need all the rest you can get."

"So I do perhaps. Well, then, I must go. I shall never see you again, I suppose."

"I suppose not," said Raymond, a little touched by his father's manner, but feeling that he would not have things otherwise for all the world.

"You are glad of it, I dare say—you have good cause to be. I have not deserved well of you, I know."

Raymond remained silent; he could not contradict, and he would not assent.

"But I have been heavily punished—as heavily as those I have most wronged could desire. If you only knew how heavily, I think you would be almost sorry for me."

"I am already," answered Raymond sadly. "I am sorry for you with all my heart."

"God bless you for that word," said Walter Lee, while, partly from weakness, partly from emotion, a few tears gathered in the eyes which his son remembered so clear and cold and unsympathizing. "And if I should ever happen to want a trifle more, you will send it, won't you?" he added, reverting from pathos to business.

"Yes, if I have it to send."

"Thank you, Raymond, dear Raymond—thank you. I must say good-bye now, I suppose?"

"It will be best, I think."

"It will. But it is hard to have to part forever with one's only son. Good-bye."

"Good-bye—father," said Raymond, forcing himself to speak the word. "I hope that all will go well with you."

For an instant the two men—father and son, yet so dissimilar at every point—held each other by the hand with something of friendliness; and then each went his way, the one hurrying across the road into the obscurity whence he had emerged, the other turning back into the dull home where the sense of inherited shame had, like some evil spirit, so long dwelt with him.

As he re-entered it now, it looked more cheerful to him than it had done for a long time past. The light in the study seemed to burn brightly as though to bid him welcome, and the sight of the mass of papers that lay on the table awaiting his attention did but inspire him with new zest for his work. For, as he hoped, he had just done forever with that painful episode of his life which had begun when yonder man had first accosted him at the gate, and declared himself to be the father he had so long deemed dead. The incubus which had then come back to settle upon him was removed again, was left forever behind in the darkness of the night. He had taken final farewell of the trembling fugitive who was his father, and the secret of that fugitive's return had not been discovered. The danger he had dreaded was over now, or would be over in another day, and might be forgotten like a hideous dream. When Raymond sat down again to his work that night, he felt as one newly lightened of a heavy load.

CHAPTER XLVI.

5 PARADISE PLACE.

MEANWHILE Walter Lee was returning toward the dingy lodgings which for the present he called home.

But he was not returning alone. No sooner

had he crossed the road after leaving his son, than there came toward him a woman—the same whose form Raymond had dimly descried in the darkness a few evenings ago. A handsome woman she had evidently been once, and to some extent was still; with a tall figure which looked stately in spite of the tawdry shabbiness of her apparel, and dark hair and eyes, the latter as imperiously flashing as they had been in times gone by, before her cheeks had lost their roundness and her complexion its freshness.

"Well?" she inquired on rejoining her companion. "How much?"

"How much?" he repeated hesitatingly.

"Yes, how much? That's English, I suppose."

"Not so much as you expected, I am afraid. What do you say to thirty pounds?"

He glanced at her furtively as he spoke, as though watching the effect of his words.

She started, and looked at him with a scowl.

"Thirty pounds!"

"Only for the present, you know. It will do to pay traveling expenses, and directly he hears of our arrival out, he is to send a good round sum—something like three or four hundred. He won't give a farthing more while we stop here. So the quicker we are about it the better on all accounts, you see."

"Thirty pounds!"

"You shall have every farthing to lay out yourself if you like," he promised deprecatingly. "Only don't say any thing more about it just now, but let us go in as fast as we can and make ready. Remember, we have got to start for Liverpool the first thing to-morrow morning."

"And when we reach the other side he is sure to send more, you say?"

"Yes, so you see how necessary it is to make haste," he answered almost imploringly.

"Very well, we will make as much haste as you like. I don't want to stay out of the money any more than you do."

The pair began their walk homeward—quickly at first, for the man was very eager; but presently his strength flagged, and they moved forward more slowly.

"Thirty pounds!" repeated the woman contentuously, after a few minutes of discontented rumination. "And is that all he has done for you? A dutiful son indeed!"

The taunt jarred disagreeably on Walter Lee's nerves, more perhaps from his hatred for the speaker than from the kindness he felt in a feeble sort of way toward Raymond.

"I wish you would leave my son alone. He is as dutiful as I deserve that he should be, and nobody has better cause to understand that than you have. I have no claim upon him, you know I have not. It was one of the things I gave up fifteen years ago," he added with a shudder.

"One of the things you gave up!" she exclaimed, suddenly turning upon him with a blaze of indignation in her dark eyes. "Do you fancy then that you were the only one who had any thing to give up?"

"You had only that old man, you know," he muttered, a little cowed.

"And did not that old man die three months after I was fool enough to follow you? If I had waited, I should have been a handsome widow with a little money into the bargain, and do you

think I could not have done better with myself then? The things you gave up indeed! I only wish I had never set eyes upon you."

"I wish so too," he assented bitterly. "I might have been an honest man still."

She laughed disdainfully.

"You an honest man! And pray who made you a dishonest man? Do you mean to say it was I?"

"You know very well that you advised me to—to do what I did fifteen years ago. Why, I remember you once arguing an hour together to show how safely I might do it, and how it would throw every body off the scent if I hid for a night in your house. Ah! I have not forgotten."

The woman looked at him with an expression of infinite scorn.

"Yes, when you came and told me how you had gone on robbing the Company for years, and that it was going to be all found out, I gave you the advice you wanted me to give, and helped you to follow it—I have not forgotten that either. I saved you, in fact—because I was blind enough to like you and think you worth giving up every thing in the world for. I little knew the coward I was sacrificing myself to."

The word seemed to sting what miserable remnant of manhood was left in him.

"I was not a coward then, and you know it. You would not have dared to speak so to me once. And you would not dare now, if I had only kept my health. But I am not the man I was, or a great many things would have been different. I am not the man I was."

He sighed, and yet there was a kind of dreary complacency in his tones while he repeated the phrase, as though he accepted it as his own sufficient apology.

"Do you mean to threaten me with what you would have done if you had been the man you were? Take care, I can threaten as well as you—ay, and execute too."

He stole a frightened look at her, and answered submissively—

"I was not thinking of threatening you."

"After all, I dare say you were not—threatening is not your way. No, you would not threaten, you would only sneak away and leave me to starve if you could—that's all. But you couldn't succeed, you see—I am not to be deceived so easily."

"I know you are not; it would be no good to try, even if I wished it. And I am sure you can not think that I ever should wish to try again," he added with another frightened look.

She returned it with a glance full of suspicion.

"I know nothing about that. But you had better be careful, for I know that if ever I do find you trying to deceive me again, I will be revenged as sure as your name is . . ."

"Emma, for Heaven's sake don't," he interrupted entreatingly.

Nobody was near them, but he seemed to be afraid of the very stones hearing his secret.

"As you call yourself Mr. James Allen," she concluded with a laugh. "But take care, or there is no knowing what I may say. Why, what's the matter?"

He had suddenly stopped, and, panting for breath, was leaning for support against the railings of a house in front of which they were pass-

ing. He remained thus some little time; then, with an effort, set himself once more on his way, muttering feebly between intervals of coughing—

"It is gone again now. You ought not to excite me so when you know how bad it is for me. So weak and ill as I am just now—oh dear! And this long weary walk—it is enough to kill me."

"It will be no fault of mine if it does," said the woman harshly. "You were not fit for going out so soon, and I told you so, but you wouldn't wait."

"I could not, I could not," he answered impatiently, accelerating his pace. "It is the air of this place that hurts me—I shall never be well till I am out of it. Let us make haste, let us make haste. Oh! if only I were once safe out of it!"

They held on their way in silence, but more quickly than heretofore, the man seeming inspired with a sudden accession, if not of strength, at least of energy.

A tedious uninviting way it was, through a monotonous succession of dismal ill-lit streets, where the rays of an occasional lamp (what shops there were had all been shut up by this time) served to show the outlines of shabby little two-storied houses bordering narrow and uneven pavements. In the day-time the said pavements were usually swarming with a large and extremely unwashed juvenile population, who carried on their infantine sports in sublime indifference to the convenience of the occasional passer-by; but at this hour the neighborhood was little better than a desert for loneliness. Here and there a more or less drunken man might be seen or heard making his way homeward, but in general the inhabitants of the district were a laborious, moderately sober set, who had to be early at work and liked to be in-doors betimes.

At last the couple reached the street which was their destination—one pretty much like the others through which they had passed, except perhaps that it was a shade narrower and dingier and altogether more shabby. This was Paradise Place, and Number 5 Paradise Place was a little dirty yellow brick house built on the exact pattern of its neighbors—with a door and two windows looking on the street; the lower window barricaded by a pair of weather-beaten outside shutters that had been once upon a time green, which (once-upon-a-time-green) was the color of the door also. Just over the door there might have been seen by day-light a little square sign-board with an unintelligible pictorial representation thereon, made scarcely less unintelligible by the name "Moggs" inscribed in bright yellow letters above, and the legend "Mangling done here" inscribed in equally bright yellow letters underneath. The pictorial representation was probably meant for a mangle, but it might have done almost equally well for a male or female Moggs. It was too dark just now for this bewildering sign-board to be visible, but its use was sufficiently superseded by the sound of a mangle in full operation inside. Evidently the inmates of the house were not thinking of bed yet, as was farther testified by the light that streamed cheerfully through a couple of heart-shaped holes in the top of the shutters.

At the door of this house the wayfarers came to a halt, the man breathing very hard, as

though his exertions had been too much for him. Their knock was presently answered by the mistress of the house, a rosy, buxom-looking young woman—if she had not been young she would have had no chance of obtaining her present lodgers—who came to the door with a baby in her arms. But the noise of the mangle still continued.

"Why, it's Mr. and Mrs. Allen! I declare I had almost forgotten you were not at home. A nasty dark night it is, to be sure! I hope Mr. Allen's none the worse for being out in it."

The new-comers entered, and stood in the narrow passage. Thence, if they had chosen, they might have had a full view of the interior suggested by the illuminated heart-shaped holes in the shutters. An open door showed a room where apparently the domestic life of the household was principally carried on, but which it would be difficult to characterize properly, so many and various were the uses to which it was applied. It was a kind of kitchen, containing a kitchen dresser and kitchen utensils, and at this moment a bright kitchen fire. At the same time it was partly a nursery, seeing that in one corner there stood a little bed with two small children asleep—so very small, however, as perhaps to be hardly worth mentioning. It was certainly something of a parlor and dining-room, the remains of a savory tripe supper still smoking on the table. Also to some extent it might claim to be a laundry, since in another corner there was a large mangle, which a big-boned fresh-colored young man was just now engaged in working. This was no other than the master of the house, Mr. Moggs, who, like the dutiful husband and good-natured fellow that he was, regularly took a turn at his wife's mangle when he came home from his day's work, in consideration of the cares with which lodgers, the two small children aforesaid, and a baby, oppressed the poor little woman's head.

At sight of his lodgers, Mr. Moggs left off mangling, and instinctively put up his hand to touch his hat, but, finding none there, pulled his hair instead.

"Good-evening, sir. Hope I see you better, sir."

The person addressed murmured a few inaudible words in answer, and Mrs. Moggs suddenly put in, with something like a cry—

"Gracious goodness, what's the matter? Dear heart alive, you do look ill, sir!"

He had just turned his face toward the open door of the room, and certainly the ghastly expression that the light showed went far to justify Mrs. Moggs's alarm. He was pale as death, save for a bright hectic spot that burned on each cheek, and his eyes were shining with an unnatural brilliancy which was almost spectral.

"What are you looking at?" he asked, half angrily. "Nonsense, I am well enough—I am only a little tired."

But he staggered as he spoke, and had to catch hold of his companion's arm to steady himself.

"You will need to be early to-morrow morning," he went on feverishly, addressing the landlady. "We are going away by the first train—mind, we must be out of the house by seven o'clock at latest."

"Law! so early as that—you're never fit for

it, sir. And as for traveling to-morrow, I don't believe you can, and I'm sure Mrs. Allen will say the same—can he now, ma'am?"

"But I must—I will!" he cried vehemently, the hectic spots deepening into crimson with his excitement. "Nothing shall keep me—do you hear? I choose to go, and I . . . Oh Heaven!"

He ceased suddenly, and laid his hand on his heart. Then his limbs seemed to give way under him, and he slid downward to the floor, where he lay prostrate with his head in the lap of the so-called Mrs. Allen. The landlady screamed, and her husband came running out to assist.

"Oh dear, dear!" said Mr. Moggs, scratching his head in masculine helplessness. "Here's a sad job to be sure! Poor gentleman—he do look bad. What had I better do? run for a doctor, hadn't I?"

The sick man was lying apparently insensible, with closed eyes, but he opened them at this, and murmured—

"No—no doctor—I won't have a doctor."

He had spent so many years in guarding against the chances of recognition and detection, that caution had become second nature with him.

"Poor dear! he is bad, to be sure!" said Mrs. Moggs sympathizingly, for he had again closed his eyes, and was lying with no other sign of life than an occasional convulsively drawn breath. "Oh! Mrs. Allen, ma'am, what shall we do?"

"Nothing—except help me to carry him up to bed," said the other woman composedly—"every thing else I can manage myself. I have seen him in this state before—it has something to do with the heart, I believe. No, there is no need for a doctor, I assure you. I know what to do quite well."

Without much difficulty, for his recent illness and a long course of previous ill-health had reduced him almost to a skeleton, the patient was carried up stairs by his supposed wife and Mr. Moggs—Mrs. Moggs following with the light and sundry compassionate ejaculations.

"Poor gentleman, what a thing it is, to be sure! And him making so certain of getting away to-morrow, and all! Ah! I thought at the time he wasn't fit for it, and you see I was right, worse luck. To-morrow indeed! there's not much chance of that now."

CHAPTER XLVII.

WALTER LEE'S DREAM.

THEY carried him up stairs to the miserable garret which was the best bedroom of the establishment, and laid him, still insensible, upon the hard uncomfortable bed that constituted its most important piece of furniture.

Here, partly by the exertions of the kind-hearted landlady and her husband, partly by the remedies which his companion found among his scanty store of belongings, the most alarming symptoms of the patient's state were gradually subdued. His pulse became by degrees less fitful and irregular, his breathing less labored; and at last the unnatural stupor which had so suddenly overpowered him gave way to a calm and apparently sound sleep.

By this time it was very late, and Mr. Moggs,

having done all that in him lay, had gone down stairs to the repose which he had justly earned by a hard day's work at very moderate wages. But the good-natured little landlady still lingered, watching by the patient's bedside, and regaling the supposed Mrs. Allen with sundry whispered and intensely uninteresting anecdotes relating to her courtship, marriage, and the birth and ailments of each of her three children. It is probable that if only she had been allowed to go on with these, she would not have grudged giving up her whole night's rest to attendance on the invalid, for Mrs. Moggs's was one of those happily constituted minds which are able to find in the recital of the most commonplace personal experiences a sovereign and never-failing antidote against tedium of all descriptions. But talk of this kind was not and never had been to Emma Underwood's taste. She evidently chafed under Mrs. Moggs's company and conversation, and, after enduring them for some time with ill-concealed impatience, cut the good woman short with a pretty plain intimation that there was no farther occasion for her services, and that so much whispering might disturb Mr. Allen. So, rather reluctantly, Mrs. Moggs was obliged to break off, leaving Tommy in the very act of cutting his first tooth at the creditably early age of six months and six days (but he was always an uncommon child, and the best temper, ma'am, that you ever set eyes on); and, with a secret sense of injury which she was too good-natured to express, she left the room. Presently she was heard, like the careful housewife that she was, drawing the bolts and putting up the chain of the street door, and then all became silent. Emma Underwood was alone for the night with the sleeping man.

Her first act after the departure of the landlady was to ascertain whether he really was sleeping. She approached him with the candle by which the room was dimly lighted, and passed it rapidly before his closed eyes. He never opened them, and continued breathing calmly and regularly as before. The experiment seemed to satisfy her; she put down the candle, and, creeping toward the door, softly turned the key.

The patient was, however, not sleeping so soundly as his perfect external tranquillity would have suggested.

His bodily faculties were indeed in complete repose, being thoroughly exhausted by the fatigues they had just undergone; but at the same time his mind, perhaps from the effect of the stimulants administered to restore him, was in a state of feverish unwholesome excitement. He had never dreamed so actively and so vividly as he dreamed this night. One series of mental images after another flitted through his brain, apparently as unreasonable and disjointed as dreams generally are, yet some of them as distinct as the most distinct waking impressions. Once or twice he actually came to the point of vaguely wondering whether he was sleeping or waking; and yet even these returns of comparative self-consciousness were attended by the strange out-of-the-flesh kind of feeling which sometimes accompanies the dreaming state.

The first idea, or set of ideas, which passed through his mind while he lay in this condition—the first at least which impressed him sufficiently to be remembered afterward—was possibly

suggested, according to that mysterious law of cause and effect which so often makes a dreamer's imaginings dependent on some external incident, by the action of Emma Underwood when she turned the light of the candle on his face.

He thought he was riding by night through a dreary desolate country where nothing grew but stunted furze-bushes (the dreaming mind has been known to invent almost instantaneously a whole series of introductory circumstances to make an artistic setting for the idea suggested from without). The sky above him was dark and lowering; the wind howled about his ears as he rode; and the bushes assumed fantastic spectre-like shapes, and seemed to be shaking their lean fingers at him as in mockery. On he rode—on, on—when suddenly there streamed in his eyes out of the darkness a flash as of a gun. For a moment he hardly knew what happened; he seemed to be making a great rush through the air—then came a pause, and he found himself received into the company of the spectre bushes, which closed in around him, full of spectre faces that grinned and made mouths. He was very much afraid, and his heart began to beat.

All at once the scene changed.

This time it seemed to him that he was lying in bed in a mean scantily furnished room with a low ceiling—so low that its weight seemed almost to oppress him. The place was badly lighted, with nothing save a dull glimmering candle that stood on a table near the foot of the bed, but it was so small that he was able to see with tolerable distinctness into every part of it. A window was opposite to him, concealed by a dirty white blind, which in its turn was partially covered by a black shawl pinned across by way of curtain. On the left-hand side was a high chimney-piece with two tall phials on it that looked like medicine bottles. On the right there stood against the wall a rickety chest of drawers, on which lay a woman's bonnet with crumpled green ribbons, and a pair of gloves. The paper of the room was very coarse and of an ugly color and pattern, representing a succession of gray-brown Gothic arches, and in one corner it was torn, and hung from the wall in long unsightly shreds. In these and all other particulars, the chamber which he now saw corresponded exactly with that best bedroom at Mrs. Moggs's in which he had fallen asleep, and even in the confused dreamy state of his faculties he was conscious of the resemblance.

But this was not all that he saw, or thought he saw, in this new scene into which he looked. At the foot of the bed, near the candle, there stood the figure of a woman—strangely, and as it seemed to him fearfully, caricatured by the monstrous shadow which it cast on the wall and ceiling. Looking back from the shadow to the figure, he saw the profile of a handsome, scornful-looking face, framed with black hair that shone darkly in the candle-light, and he knew the woman at once for Emma Underwood.

He expected that she would speak; but no, she did not even seem to notice him, and went on with what she was doing. What that was he did not know. At first it appeared to him that she was turning over a heap of dark clothing at his feet, but presently he thought he saw her looking intently into something that seemed like an open book. It occurred to him vaguely that the book, what-

ever it was, must be very interesting since she was so silent over it; and then came a blank in his thoughts, and for a while he neither saw nor heard.

Soon a new scene rose up before him.

He was walking through a North American forest. It was late in autumn, for the trees were bare, and dead leaves lay on the ground ankle-deep, impeding his progress by clinging about his feet, and making the strangest rustle at every step he took. It was neither day nor night, but something between the two—that kind of dim mysterious twilight which under ordinary circumstances is the nearest imitation of a natural atmosphere that the dreaming mind has energy to conjure up. He could see the sky overhead between the naked branches, but it was the sky of a dream, a sky in which neither sun nor stars shine, nor clouds float. He was alone; no human voice was near to cheer him; not even a bird chirped among the leafless branches; nothing was to be heard but the constant rustle under his feet. Far, far behind him he could see when he looked back, standing at the very extremity of a long glade through which he was journeying, the figure of a man making signs to him. He could not see the man's face, but he knew him to be Raymond, and he knew too that the signs meant that he must make haste, that if he did not make haste he would be lost and Raymond with him.

Onward he struggled, ever onward, but the leaves lay thicker and thicker under his feet and rustled louder and louder, and it appeared to him that he made no advance at all. Ever and anon he looked back, and there he always saw the figure standing at the entrance of the glade, and waving its arms, yet never seeming any farther off than it had done at first. He thought once or twice that it tried to speak, but the leaves kept on rustling, rustling, rustling, so that he could hear no sound besides. He knew, however, what the figure would say if it could—"Away, away—make haste, make haste, make haste."

But strive as he would, he could not away, he could not make haste—not though he knew that once out of that forest-path he would be safe and Raymond satisfied. The leaves heaped themselves about his feet, and weighed upon them like lead at every step; they had lain ankle-deep at first, but they were knee-deep now. He toiled and labored and strained—it was no use; and presently he found that he could not lift his feet at all; that instead of lifting them he was being drawn down farther and farther, sucked in by that rustling sea of dead leaves. He tried to clear a way for himself with his hands, but he only sank deeper and deeper; he clutched at the leaves, but they only rustled in his grasp; he looked to one side and then to the other for help, but the cruel forest-trees only nodded to each other in triumph.

Then at last, when the leaves had risen almost to his neck, pressing upon his chest with the pressure of a vice, he bethought himself of looking round for Raymond. But Raymond was gone, and only a shadow was left where he had been—a great black crooked shadow that rose straight up for a little way and then bent itself against the sky.

A new change.

The shadow which he took for Raymond's was transformed into that which he had already seen

cast against the wall and ceiling of the room that looked like Mrs. Moggs's best bedroom; it seemed to him that he was taken back to that room again. Every thing was there that he had seen before—the window, the chimney-piece with the phials, the chest of drawers with the bonnet and gloves, the ugly paper with the torn piece in one corner; every thing, even the woman like Emma Underwood, and her distorted shadow. But she was not reading now; she was sewing, and the shadow was sewing too, moving its black arm to and fro with hideous diligence. She was partly undressed, and sat with an old cloak thrown over her bare shoulders, doing something to her gown. What was she doing? Apparently stitching dead leaves into the lining. Dead leaves—or perhaps paper; the sound was much the same.

Another blank came over him, and then a new scene appeared.

New but old too—the kitchen in the ale-house at North Hollsworth.

It was evening. He stood booted and spurred as though about to undertake a journey, and before him there sat a young and beautiful woman sewing. A woman with dark hair and eyes, rich Spanish complexion, and tall graceful figure; the same and yet not the same as the Emma Underwood whom he had left in Mrs. Moggs's bedroom. For this Emma was fifteen years younger than that Emma had been; this Emma was still in the youth and spring-time of her beauty; her hands were plump and white and dainty, and plied their task coquettishly as well as diligently. That task was sewing papers of different sizes and qualities, including a roll of bank-notes (what a rustling the bank-notes made!), into the lining of a man's greatcoat. And he was waiting for her to finish that he might put it on.

The sewing and rustling came to an end somehow or other—here the activity of his brain must have flagged a little, for this part of the dream, if not quite a blank, was very hazy and confused—and, without knowing how, he found that he had got away from Emma, and that his journey was begun. By this time he must have forgotten all about North Hollsworth, for he thought his way lay through the solitary road where Raymond's house was situated, and that a man passed him whom in the darkness he at first took for Raymond and was going to accost, when all at once he discovered that it was somebody else (some reminiscence of Joe Pullyn was apparently in his mind here). He got to the end of the road safely—by what process he knew not, but he fancied that Raymond's chimney being on fire had something to do with it—and suddenly found himself emerging on one of the Liverpool quays, by the side of which lay moored a steamer just ready to start. He entered eagerly; no sooner had he done so than the vessel began to move, and he thought to himself how wonderfully lucky he had been to get on board in time.

At this point his ideas became slightly more logical and coherent. The vessel glided on, holding her course noiselessly through a sea as smooth and shining as glass, and he sat on deck watching her progress. It was no longer night now, but the same kind of sickly twilight which had attended him in his walk through the forest, and he was able to see every thing about him quite *plainly*. The sky looked glassy as well as the sea;

there was an unnatural sort of hard steely polish about them both.

But more unnatural yet was the perfect stillness on every side—in the air, in the sea, in the vessel herself. She was cleaving her way through the water with marvelous swiftness, and yet no breath of wind sighed in the rigging, no ripple splashed against the hull, no smoke puffed from the funnel.

Nor was this all of peculiar that he noticed in his surroundings. There were other passengers on deck, some sitting almost close to himself, but not one of them breathed a word. He wondered very much what manner of people they were who sat so silent, and tried to look at their faces.

But here another singularity presented itself. Not a face but was either concealed by some intervening obstacle, or turned away so that he could not see it. A few paces from him on the same bench there sat some one who looked like an old gentleman, with a pair of stooping shoulders, and white hair that peeped out from under a black felt hat; but he was holding a newspaper close to his face, which was thus entirely hidden. A little beyond this person again, were a gentleman and lady, both young, to judge from their figures—a pair of lovers, perhaps, or a bride and bridegroom on their honey-moon trip; but they sat looking into each other's faces, and nothing could be seen of the features of either. He turned his eyes toward the opposite side of the deck; there too curiosity was equally baffled. One gentleman was sitting with an umbrella before his face; a lady close by had a thick black veil drawn over hers; a group of young men were standing up with their backs turned toward him, apparently watching the sea and sky. Even a little baby that lay in its nurse's lap had its face covered with a white handkerchief, while that of the woman was concealed by a book she was reading. At the end of the vessel stood the pilot, turning his wheel first one way and then another, but with averted face likewise, looking steadfastly to the horizon.

A strange uneasiness seized him. The face of one of those people he must see, come what would. He turned to the old gentleman with the newspaper who was his nearest neighbor, and inquired—

"Any news to-day, sir?"

The old gentleman did not answer a word or move a muscle.

He wondered very much, but thought to himself that perhaps the old gentleman was deaf, and rose to cross the deck, determining to try some of the people at the other side. Every thing was still profoundly silent, and he noticed with some surprise that he did not even hear his own footfall as he walked. On getting near enough the other passengers to enter into conversation, he began with the remark—

"A very fast-moving vessel this seems to be."

He had not addressed any one in particular, but he was near enough to be heard by all of them—by the gentleman with the umbrella, the lady with the veil, the group of young men standing up, the nurse-maid with the book before her face—and each would have been entitled to answer him had he or she been so minded. Yet not one spoke, not one stirred. The gentleman did not move his umbrella; the lady did not raise her veil; none of the young men turned

round; the nurse-maid did not look up from her book.

He wondered more than ever, and grew more than ever determined. A face he must and would see. He came away from the people who had used him so churlishly, and (again surprised to find how noiselessly he walked) went to the end of the vessel to speak to the pilot. As he drew near, he found the man's face still averted, and read on a board in front of the wheel the word "Silence" inscribed in large flame-colored letters. But the warning did not discourage him from his purpose. On the contrary he argued with himself thus: "If it is against the rules to talk to the pilot, so much the better; when I speak it will make him angry, and then he will be sure to look round." So he went up, and asked—

"When do you think we shall arrive?"

The man was looking far away from him, and did not answer.

He put the question again. Again the same result.

He put the question a third time.

The man turned his head slowly round so that his whole face became visible to the questioner.

It was the face of a dead man.

He understood all now. The vessel was not taking him to another country, but to another world; all her passengers were dead people bound upon the same journey.

As this revelation flashed upon him, he suddenly beheld mountains rising up on the horizon — lurid transparent-looking masses with flanks that heaved and quivered as though some mighty convulsion were at work within. And presently flames began to issue forth from them — many-colored tongues of fire, streaking the whole sky with jets of red and green and purple light. The Day of Judgment had come, and these were the flames that were to consume the heavens and the earth.

He woke trembling from head to foot. Thank God, it had been only a dream. He was alive and safe — safe in that best bedroom of Mrs. Moggs's where he had already twice thought himself to be lying since he began to dream; only now he was broad awake, and knew that he was awake. It was still night, but a candle was burning on the table at the foot of the bed, and by its light he saw moving about the room Emma Underwood, with her dress on this time (what a strange idea that had been of his that he had seen her sewing dead leaves into it!). He watched her for some minutes, and saw that she was collecting her few articles of personal property, and tying them together into a small bundle. He wondered at first, but presently remembered the journey they were to undertake together on the morrow, and felt quite grateful to her for remembering it too, and thus preparing for it while he slept. He was inclined to speak and thank her, but was so feeble that he shrank from the effort; and, after watching her for another minute or two, closed his eyes and once more disposed himself to sleep. This time his mind was tired out as well as his body, and his slumber was sound and dreamless.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WALTER LEE'S AWAKENING.

HE slept thus for some hours, waking to find it broad day-light, and Emma Underwood unpinning the shawl that hung across the window. The first thing that occurred to him on opening his eyes was his journey — not the grim journey he had taken last night (strangely enough he never thought of that), but the real journey he was bent on beginning to-day.

"What o'clock is it?" he asked eagerly.

She started to hear his voice, but answered sullenly—

"Nearly seven, I think."

"Seven! Why did you not call me before? We ought to be out of the house by seven."

"What are you talking of?" she asked scornfully. "You don't persuade yourself that you are fit to travel to-day, do you?"

"Yes, yes, but I am," he cried with feverish impatience. "I tell you I must go and I will."

His face flushing with excitement, he raised himself, and stretched his hand toward his clothes. But hardly had he made the effort when his muscles relaxed again, and he sank back on his pillow overcome with exhaustion. Emma Underwood was right; he was not fit to travel that day, and was forced to acknowledge it.

"It must be to-morrow, I suppose," he murmured querulously. "To-morrow! what a time it seems! And we shall lose the steamer—we shall lose days. Oh! when am I to get out of this dreadful country? when? when?"

For some time he continued complaining thus, and tossing uneasily to and fro; then, wearied out with his exertions, gradually became quiet again, and lay with closed eyes as though asleep.

But in reality he remained as broad awake as ever. He was in a state of mental excitement which put sleep out of the question for the present; and while his body was resting, his thoughts were busy making new calculations of the day and hour by which he might hope to start upon his still deferred journey. Meantime his ears were acutely sensitive to each sound that reached them, and every thing seemed to fret and disturb him — the bustling footsteps of Mr. and Mrs. Moggs down stairs, the unfastening of the street door, the wakening up of the baby, the early morning criers in the street; above all, for the very reason that they were so strangely quiet, the slow cautious movements of Emma Underwood as she crept about the room, evidently fancying that he slept and afraid of awaking him. He was not accustomed to so much consideration from her, and at last from being simply annoyed, he began to wonder what she was doing, and opened his eyes.

She was tying on her bonnet before the glass — the bonnet with green strings which he had seen, or thought he had seen, last night. Plainly she was going out. But where could she be going at that early hour?

He did not shut his eyes again, but lay quiet, watching her.

Having tied on her bonnet, she stole across the room on tiptoe to a small bundle which lay ready made up on the chest of drawers; and, having stowed it out of sight under her shawl, advanced, still on tiptoe, toward the door. Was

she going on a journey, then? But what kind of a journey could it be, and how could she undertake it without money?

He did not speak. Instinctive fear of what she might do to him kept him silent, and, still watching, he saw her softly unlock the door and glide out of the room. Hardly had she closed the door behind her when he heard her voice on the landing speaking to Mrs. Moggs, who, it seemed, must have been coming up stairs at the same moment.

"Thank you, Mr. Allen is a great deal better this morning. Hush—not too loud, or we shall disturb him. Yes, I may be some little time away; I am going to try if I can get some grapes; he has taken such a fancy for a few. Thank you, no—he wants nobody to sit with him. Don't go near him, please, while I am away; he is comfortably asleep, and it would be a pity to waken him."

In another moment every thing was silent, and with a beating heart Walter Lee lay wondering what it all meant, and ransacking his memory to discover whether he had really asked for grapes.

Suddenly he remembered his dream.

Gracious Heaven! had it been only a dream, or had she really been sewing something into her dress last night? And if she had, what had that something been?

He started up, and with a movement of wild fear clutched at the heap of clothes at the foot of the bed—that heap of clothes among which he had a vague idea of having seen her fumbling. The first thing he laid his hand on was the coat he had worn last night—the coat in which he had placed his precious pocket-book. But where was his pocket-book now? He felt in every pocket with trembling eagerness—it was nowhere to be found. Then that was the book he had seen her reading with such intentness! And yonder it was, lying empty and rifled on the floor!

A loud cry went pealing through the house, starting Mr. and Mrs. Moggs from their breakfast, and sending them rushing up stairs in hot haste to their lodger's room.

They found him in terrible excitement, almost foaming with delirious frenzy.

"Help, help, help! I am robbed—I am robbed. Do you hear me? Oh! why don't you help me—why don't you follow her?"

"Who do you mean, sir?" said Mr. Moggs, speaking with his mouth full, and in extreme bewilderment. "Only say the word, and I'm willing to do all as lays in my power, I'm sure. Who shall I follow?"

"Her, of course—her—the woman that has just gone out. She has robbed me—do you hear—robbed me. Three hundred pounds—all I have in the world—the money that was to save me. Oh! make haste, make haste."

"Mrs. Allen, sir?"

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Allen, or whatever she calls herself. Quick! quick!"

"All right, sir, I'll have her back in no time. I see'd the way she took."

And with these words Mr. Moggs plunged down stairs four steps at a time—lost in amazement, and with a dim notion that his lodger was probably insane, but slightly alarmed withal at the idea of a catastrophe which might interfere with the regular payment of his own little weekly bill.

No sooner had Mr. Moggs departed on his errand than the sick man remembered something which made his heart turn cold with terror.

"No, no, no—tell him he need not go. It was all a mistake; tell him not to go."

"He is gone, sir," said Mrs. Moggs. "Lay down like a good soul and keep quiet. Of course it was all a mistake, but after all, what do it signify?"

"Call him back, call him back—he must not go. If she is meddled with, you don't know what she will do. Call him back, I tell you."

"It is too late to call him back, sir. Why, he must be out of the street by this time. But bless you, Mr. Allen dear, don't fret about that."

"Too late!"

It was all he had strength left to exclaim, and scarcely had he uttered the words when he fell back on the pillow; and Mrs. Moggs, rushing forward to assist him, found that he had once more fainted.

Meantime Mrs. Moggs's husband was devoting all his energies to the pursuit of the fictitious Mrs. Allen.

She had the advantage of about three minutes' start, but he had youth and muscle on his side. Moreover he ran at full speed, whereas, partly from fear of attracting observation, partly because she had no idea that her flight would be so soon discovered, she was only proceeding at a quick walk. She was taking the nearest way to the railway station, being in too great a hurry to think of making any unnecessary circuit; and Mr. Moggs, who had besides seen her set out, had just shrewdness enough to think that she might be going thither. The consequence was, that on rounding the corner of Paradise Place into the next street, which happened to be a pretty long one, he turned his head in the right direction, and saw a figure which he knew to be that of his lodger at the farther end of it, posting on at a rate which threatened in a few moments to take her again out of sight.

Mr. Moggs was now thoroughly warmed in his work, and gave chase with redoubled vigor. The spectacle of a responsible householder, hatless and in his shirt sleeves, tearing like mad along the street, naturally excited the curiosity of the passers-by; and on understanding from his signs and broken ejaculations who the object of his pursuit was, some half dozen men and boys joined him in the race, setting up at the same time sundry discordant exclamations intended as a hue and cry.

At first the woman took no notice of the sounds behind her, and held on her way regardless of them, but presently as they drew nearer they seemed to rouse her wonder or suspicion, and she turned her head. Mr. Moggs saw that her eyes fell upon him first, and he saw too an expression of surprise and dismay cross her features which convinced him that his week's rent had been in jeopardy.

For an instant she looked around as though uncertain what to do. She was still some fifty paces in advance of the foremost of her pursuers, and was almost close to a corner which, once turned, might conceal her a few seconds from their observation. But they were many and she was one, and at the corner, arrested by the noise, stood a group of three or four men going to their day's work, who would probably be more ready

to aid in her capture than her escape. She understood at once that all farther endeavors would be useless, and, like some wild animal brought to bay, faced round, and proudly awaited the approach of her captors.

"What do you want with me?" she demanded haughtily, as Mr. Moggs came panting up.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, taken rather aback by the question and the manner of the questioner. "I beg your pardon, but the gentleman says you've robbed him."

The woman's eyes flashed fire, and she set her teeth.

"Fetch a policeman, somebody, and cut it short," put in a burly fellow who had been one of the most active in the pursuit; and immediately two or three of the crowd detached themselves with an alacrity which showed the errand to be a highly congenial one. "Catch hold of her other wrist, Moggs, and I'll keep this one—she's dangerous."

And certainly she did look dangerous, but to the surprise of the spectators she submitted herself to this rough handling with entire quiescence.

"Do just what you like," she said calmly, speaking with a composure which would have been perfect except for a certain ominous quivering of the lower lip—"exactly what you like. Put me in prison, or hang me if the law will let you—I make no resistance. Only remember, whatever you do to me, you must do ten times worse to the man who says I robbed him. It is he who is the robber—the greatest robber in all the town. Would you like to know who he is? then I will tell you. He is Walter Lee, the clever Secretary who ran away with his employers' money fifteen years ago. You know the name, don't you?—Walter Lee."

CHAPTER XLIX.

ESCAPED:

THAT day the gossips of St. Austin's feasted royally. Like wild-fire the news spread from mouth to mouth that Walter Lee was in the town, and had been that morning discovered—betrayed by the companion of his guilt, who was herself in custody on a charge of robbing him. The excitement was prodigious.

Large and busy commercial town though it was, St. Austin's had not yet reached such a stage of development but that one half of it knew perfectly well what the other half did. It would not be true perhaps to say that every body in it knew every body else; but every body knew, or might know if he chose, who every body else was, either by his own sources of information or those of some third person. In such a place even a comparatively tame piece of local scandal is sure to find a warm welcome and ready means of propagation, and this was a piece of scandal extraordinary. The frauds and unexpected flight of Walter Lee fifteen years ago had given the people of St. Austin's and its neighborhood one of the most stirring sensations they had ever experienced; and for all who remembered it this sensation was of course abundantly renewed by the tidings of his still more unexpected reappearance. Then for the younger generation, to

whom the returned fugitive was personally a stranger, the relation in which he stood to Raymond Lee, the sufferer by the great fire which had hardly yet ceased to be a nine days' wonder, invested him with a sufficiently piquant contemporary interest. And not only were all ages, but all classes, set talking. Even grave men of business, meeting in business hours, felt that it was not beneath their dignity to discuss in its fullest details the case of a criminal who had been a man of business himself, and whose son was at that time endeavoring to re-establish his footing among them as the head of a prosperous firm.

Thus the events of that morning were canvassed and speculated upon as never any thing had been canvassed and speculated upon in St. Austin's before. Some of the results of this flux of talk were very curious. Before the day was half over, there were persons who professed to know every particular of the defaulting Secretary's career since he had disappeared; how many and what aliases he had been known by, where he had been living, and how he had spent his money. The different versions of his history thus disseminated were very numerous and very conflicting; but all found more or less of public favor and credence, including one which gravely upheld that the fugitive had, in fact, never left the town at all.

It may be supposed that when gossip was so busy with the father, it did not altogether spare the son.

On the contrary, in almost all these speculations on Walter Lee's past life, Raymond's name was very freely introduced. A letter from him, telling his father that he had succeeded in raising the money required, was found in the lining of Emma Underwood's dress, wrapped round the stolen bank notes to keep them clean; and on this foundation of fact—though probably the architects might have done equally well without it—was reared a sky-high structure of fiction. It was a generally received hypothesis that the two Lees—as people took delight in calling them to-day—had always been in communication with each other; and some very well informed persons even went so far as to know for certain that Walter Lee had for years paid an annual subsidy to his wife and son out of the proceeds of his frauds (no wonder the young man's conscience had been tender about it). The coincidence of Raymond's absence in London with the discovery of his father's return did not escape observation. It was natural, charitably said some, that he should prefer to be out of the way at such a time. Others, more charitably still, were very fervent in hoping that there was nothing else under it, and that he too would not be found to have vanished for fifteen years. Even steady-going old foggy men of business, who were never known to commit themselves to a rash opinion, shook their heads, and declared that it was a very sad affair. They had no doubt Mr. Lee—Mr. Raymond Lee that is—would on his return be able to explain every thing to entire satisfaction, but in the mean time things had happened very unfortunately; they were sincerely sorry for him, for they knew the kind of reports which would be set up. Altogether indeed it was the very saddest affair which had ever come within their experience. And if this is

what the old fogies said, it may be imagined that other people said much worse.

Meanwhile how was it faring with the hero and centre of the day's excitement, Walter Lee himself?

He was still lying at Mrs. Moggs's, a helpless, hopeless invalid, depending on that good woman's compassion for such attendance and consolation as her other duties allowed her to afford him. For Emma Underwood was not yet avenged as she had hoped to be; her intended victim was still left free and unmolested by justice. That is to say, none of those who had suffered by his frauds had yet taken the initiative in obtaining his arrest, and in her unreasoning passion she had forgotten that any such initiative would be necessary. But though an interval of immunity was thus accorded him, of which, had health permitted, he might have profited to make his escape, it was doubtful how long that immunity would be continued. A vindictive old Anglo-Indian officer, one of the largest shareholders in the defunct Company, and consequently one of the largest losers by its break-down, was already heard threatening him with the vengeance of the law in no measured terms.

"I say it's a public duty to put the law in force against such vagabonds," declared this amiable person, twirling his mustache fiercely—"a public duty I say, sir. And as for the trumpery few pounds that the son paid up the other day, I don't see that that makes a penn'orth of difference. It doesn't in point of law, and I don't understand why it should in point of fact either. A pretty pass indeed we've come to if thieves and swindlers are to be whitewashed by their sons, who, damme sir, I believe are just as bad as their precious fathers, and worse if the truth were known. Ill! so he ought to be ill!—the damned infernal scoundrel; I only wish he had thought of being ill before he ran off with my money. It isn't for myself I speak, sir; it's for the sake of justice—and law—and example—and all that sort of thing, by Jove. No, I don't bear malice, and I never did, but if nobody else has got a conscience, I have—the confounded humbugging villain—and if nobody else will do their duty to society, I will, and that's the long and short of it."

Whereupon the public-spirited old gentleman ground his teeth savagely, doubtless as part of the duty he owed to society; and those who knew him best thought that his bite might prove quite as bad as his bark. But whether he intended to act or not, he did not act instantly; and, at all events for that first day, Walter Lee was allowed to remain a free man.

What a day it was for him! He was still free, but he suffered the anguish of capture a thousand times over. For he knew that he had been betrayed. The idea of Emma Underwood and her revenge had been the first that occurred to him on recovering from his fainting-fit that morning, and his eager questioning had made it impossible to conceal the truth. From that moment he had lain in an agony of expectant terror. If his life instead of his liberty had been forfeit to the law, he could not have dreaded the penalty more than in the weak shattered state of his nerves he dreaded it now. Every sound in the house or the street filled him with feverish apprehension that the hour he had so long feared had come, that the pursuers were upon him. In vain the

compassionate landlady tried to comfort him; he had got it into his head that his betrayal must be followed by arrest and condign punishment; and the idea, once fixed, was not to be shaken. And then the horror of being forced to lie there waiting for his doom, watching the flight of the precious minutes that might have served him for escape. The feeling of powerlessness and fear combined oppressed him as with a waking nightmare.

Thus he lay through all that weary day—alone save for the occasional presence of that good Samaritan Mrs. Moggs—helplessly feeble in body, morbidly wakeful and active in mind, filled with dread by every breath of wind that shook his casement. Thus too he lay through the still more weary night that followed—a night which for him brought with it no change but darkness and a sense of more complete solitude. It was not till the next morning that, worn out with watching and waiting, he fell into an uneasy sleep, and was for a while relieved from the cruel alarms which during all the previous day and night had tortured him.

Early in the forenoon of that second day, Mrs. Moggs was summoned by a low knock to the street door. She went to open it in some little trepidation, her lodger having partially infected her with his own fears; but she found nobody more formidable than a tall elderly man with gray hair, a furrowed yet not unkindly looking face, and a strangely nervous manner.

"You have a person here who they say is Walter Lee, have you not? Will you please let me see him?"

Mrs. Moggs hesitated. She was afraid lest she might be admitting one of those enemies who, whether existing in reality or imagination, were so much dreaded by the wretched man up stairs.

"This is the right house, is it not?" asked the stranger anxiously. "And he can't be gone yet surely, when he was so ill yesterday."

"Which I won't deny this is the right house, sir," said the landlady, coughing behind her hand to gain time. "And he ain't gone yet neither; as you say, 'tain't likely he should go when he is so bad. He is dreadful bad, poor dear, to be sure—bad enough to make a stone feel for him, which I don't mind saying I do, let his faults be what they may."

"I want to see him," said the man excitedly, at the same time endeavoring to pass, as though impatient of delay.

"Which you'll excuse my saying that I must know your business first, sir," answered the faithful Mrs. Moggs, planting herself courageously in the way. "He's asleep just now, and I don't see that he has more right to be disturbed than other people."

The visitor drew out his purse, and put the first coin that presented itself (it happened to be a half-sovereign) into Mrs. Moggs's hand.

She stared in blank astonishment. He did not in the least answer to her ideas of a lord or a millionaire, but was a plain homely-looking man with something about him that savored, to her imagination, of the country; and here he was flinging about gold pieces as though he was made of them. The inference was that he was most extraordinarily anxious to see her lodger.

"You wouldn't hurt him, sir?" she inquired

doubtfully, looking from the coin to his face with manifest hesitation.

"Hurt him!" said the man, falling back a step as if startled by the question. "Hurt him! what makes you ask? I would not for the world."

He spoke so emphatically that Mrs. Moggs was reassured at once.

"Oh! if you come as a friend, sir, that is quite different. It was only that I didn't know what you wanted, and him being asleep and all, poor fellow, it seemed a pity to disturb him."

"There is no occasion to disturb him. Only let me see him, and I do not care whether he is asleep or awake."

There was a strange concentrated earnestness about the speaker's manner which made Mrs. Moggs look at him with more surprise than ever. But his face was so free from any expression of malice or vindictiveness as completely to confirm the confidence with which the half-sovereign had inspired her.

"This way then, if you please, sir," she rejoined, and softly preceded him up stairs.

She opened the door of the bedroom, and peeped in. The patient, as she could see by his upturned face, was still sleeping—so soundly that even the noise she made in entering did not disturb him. Then, looking round for the visitor, who had followed her up stairs to the bedroom door, she motioned him to approach, watching with some curiosity as he did so.

He advanced to the bedside with trembling eagerness, and fixed his eyes on the sleeping man's face as if it were a book which he sought to read. Immediately afterward the landlady saw a blank look of disappointment cross his features. But he continued to gaze with desperate intentness, and gradually the look of disappointment became transfigured into an expression, first of satisfied conviction, then of unspeakable thankfulness. He drew a deep breath as though a weight had just been rolled off his heart, and Mrs. Moggs heard him murmur—

"Thank God!"

Just then the sleeper stirred uneasily, and in an instant afterward opened his eyes. The first object they fell on was the face watching by his bedside. He gazed on it with a terrified look of recognition.

"Haroldson!" he whispered, while he almost writhed with horror. "Haroldson! What have you come to do to me? You have no gun, but . . . Ah! I know," he cried with a sudden shriek. "A prison—that is how you will be revenged—a prison."

"Walter Lee, no," said the other solemnly. "Why do you fear me? I take God to witness that I would not hurt a hair of your head."

The assurance was spoken so gravely as to carry conviction with it, even to the fevered brain of the sick man. He became visibly calmer, and even cast at his visitor an unmistakable look of gratitude. At this juncture Mrs. Moggs's quick maternal ear caught the sound of the baby's voice down stairs, and, being now convinced that her presence was not required for her lodger's protection, she slipped out of the room in obedience to the call. The two men, Walter Lee and John Haroldson, were alone together.

"You are very good," said a feeble voice from

the bed. "When I saw it was you, I was afraid you would have no mercy."

"God forbid. I am only too thankful for the mercy he has shown to me. I thought—I thought . . . and even now I can not understand . . ."

The strong man's voice trembled and ceased; for the moment he was more unnerved than the invalid himself, who seemed to gain strength from the spectacle of his weakness, and rejoined with a faint smile—

"I know what you thought; you thought you had killed me—and I wish you had. And you very nearly did; if it had not been for my horse, that shot would have lodged in my heart. But he swerved just as you pulled the trigger, and the ball passed under my arm instead—I found that out afterward by the singeing of the sleeve."

"Oh! if I had only known! if I had only known!" groaned John Haroldson, his face covered with his hands, and his burly frame shaken with emotion. Suddenly he looked up, and added in a horrified whisper—"But the pit—I thought I saw you swallowed up with my own eyes."

"Ay, I knew you thought so, but it was not I, only my horse. He took fright at the noise of the gun, and galloped straight for the pit as you saw; but I knew what there was before me as well as you did, and, finding I could not hold him in, threw myself off and hid among the furze-bushes. You were confused, I suppose, with thinking you had wounded me, and the night was dark, and so you did not notice that when the horse went in he went in alone."

"Alone!" said John Haroldson, and drew another deep breath.

"Yes. I understood the mistake you had made when I saw you go up to the hole and listen to the poor brute groaning at the bottom, and of course I took care not to undeceive you. But I was watching you from the bushes all the time. I don't know how it was, but I was dreaming of those bushes the other night," he added with a shudder.

"If I had only known!" repeated the farmer—"If I had only known! Oh! you little guess what that mistake has made me suffer—and others besides me" (the last words in a lower voice).

Walter Lee groaned.

"I have done nothing but make other people suffer all my life," he said bitterly. "I would ask you to forgive me if I thought there was any use in it, but you would not; nobody will, either in this world or the next—nobody, nobody."

"Forgive you! who am I that I should not forgive you—I who only yesterday thought myself a murderer? Do you fancy I have forgotten that? do you fancy I ever can forget? But I was mad at the time I tried to do it—God knows I must have been mad. When you struck my arm to make me let go your bridle, I felt as if my brain had taken fire, and with the loaded gun all ready to my hand. . . . Heaven pity me, it was too much. My temper, my miserable temper got the better of me, and I have been hating myself as a murderer ever since."

"Do you mean that you really can forgive me then?" asked the invalid incredulously.

"Ay, of course I mean it; do you think I have

learned so little by what I have gone through? I forgive you as freely as I hope to be forgiven myself. And I shall be forgiven, I think; surely I shall—by token that I have been let live to see this day, this happy, happy day."

The farmer bowed his head devoutly, and his lips moved in silent thanksgiving. Meanwhile the other lay still, and looked at him with eyes half wondering, half envious.

"A happy day—can this be a happy day for any body?" He sighed and added humbly—"But I am glad that there is some one in the world who will forgive me. And Raymond too—he said he was sorry for me. Where are you going?"

The question was prompted by seeing the visitor take up his hat and stick, and was asked with such manifest disappointment that John Haroldson could not help feeling touched. He saw that he was regarded as a sort of patron and protector by the miserable man before him, and laid his hand kindly on his old enemy's shoulder as he answered—

"I will come and see you again soon, but I can't stop this time. There is some one at home that this news will do as much good to as it has done me, and I can't keep her out of it longer. God bless her! I haven't dared say aught to her yet, for fear it should turn out a mistake and break her heart downright. For I could scarce believe it wasn't a mistake until I had seen you with my own eyes, for all I heard them talk so confident about it in the village last night, and I came off first thing this morning without saying a word to any body. And what I felt when I saw you lying there before me, God above only knows."

As he spoke, he looked down at the pale pinched face on the pillow with an expression as grateful as though Walter Lee had been his chief friend and benefactor. And as such indeed for the moment John Haroldson was unreasonable enough to regard him.

While this conversation had been passing, a knock had sounded at the street door, which had been immediately opened; and for the last two or three minutes a low hum of several voices might have been heard in the passage below. But each of the two men in the sick-chamber had been too much excited by his own thoughts and recollections to notice any of these sounds.

Just as John Haroldson was turning to leave the room, he was surprised to see the door open and the landlady appear on the threshold, making signs that she wanted to speak to him. He was the more surprised because the good woman was visibly in tears, but he did not say a word to excite the patient's attention, and went to the door in silence. Mrs. Moggs was standing on the landing, holding her apron to her eyes, and evidently in great agitation.

"Oh! sir, what do you think?" she whispered.

"The men are down stairs."

"The men! What men?"

"The men, to be sure. The men after that poor dear Mr. Allen, or Lee, or whatever you may call him. It's that wicked Colonel McCracklin that has set 'em on—the hard-hearted yellow-faced old brute. And nothing will serve 'em but to come up stairs—oh dear!—though I fold them it would be as bad as murder if they touched him—oh dear!—but they say they must see him and judge for themselves—oh dear! oh dear! oh

dear! It is no good me begging and praying; all I can get is a couple of minutes to break it to him, and I want to know, sir, how you think we'd best set about it, for I believe it's as like to kill him as not. And I wouldn't have the hearts of some folks for all the money you could name, sir, nor their consciences for twice as much again."

She ceased, sobbing hysterically behind her apron; and her listener, sorely perplexed, was considering what he should advise, when suddenly a cry was heard in the room he had just left which made them both turn pale. They rushed in, and found Walter Lee sitting up in bed, trembling in every fibre, and gazing at the door with bloodshot eyes that seemed starting from their sockets with terror. Mrs. Moggs had spoken in a whisper which John Haroldson himself had found difficulty in following; but the sick man's ears, quickened by the morbid vigilance of fear, had gathered enough to inform him of what had happened.

"So they have come!" he said hoarsely, and the words seemed to rattle in his throat, "they have come! She has kept her promise then—that wicked woman, that perfidious wretch I sold myself for! Oh! the fool I have been—the fool, the fool! What! a jail—a convict-ship—oh! I know what they will do with me. A convict-ship—is that the ship where nobody speaks and every face is turned away?"

By this time he seemed to have lost all consciousness of where he was or who was with him. Every faculty was engrossed and swallowed up in an overpowering sense of dread, which, as he spoke the last words, made sweat-drops of agony stand upon his forehead.

While he paused, a sound was heard below as of footsteps beginning to ascend the stairs. The sound was related to the subject of his fear, and therefore he heard it too.

"Hark! they are coming up stairs—the men to take me to prison, the devils to fetch my soul. One step, two steps, three . . . They are coming, they are coming—they are almost come. Ay, but there is time to escape yet if I only knew how. Help! help! take me away, take me away—anywhere so that I may but escape them. Help! help!"

His appeal was answered. The footsteps came nearer and nearer; they reached the landing, and paused outside the room. In the next instant the door began to open, pushed by an unseen hand from without. But before the door had done turning upon its hinges, before the hand or the owner of the hand became visible, the prisoner had made good his escape.

He had fallen back dead in the arms of John Haroldson.

CHAPTER L.

AT THE WORST.

WHILE this was happening at St. Austin's, Raymond, having finished his business in London, was starting on his homeward journey. He had obtained the contract which he had gone to town to seek, and the success had put him in better spirits than he had known since his last visit to Black Moor Farm.

For as yet he had no suspicion of the discovery

so nearly affecting himself which had been made at St. Austin's the day before. He had left home early in the morning, within a few minutes of the time that Emma Underwood had spoken the words which were to cost her unhappy victim so dear, and thus was quite ignorant of the excitement that had sprung up so soon after his departure.

He was in better spirits to-day, it has been said, than he had been for weeks past.

Not only had he succeeded in obtaining the desired contract, but this was the day, as he remembered, on which his father was to set sail from England. The coincidence seemed of good omen. The past was done with, and a new future was about to begin. He was finally relieved (so he flattered himself) from the mingled fear, shame, and anxiety which had oppressed him since he had known his father to have ventured back to the place where his crimes were notorious; and at the same time that this the darkest era of his life was closed, a new one appeared to be opening. He had set his heart on fighting his way upward to the height from which he had fallen, and now at least he had secured a fair start, and would be able to go to work without loss of time. There is always more or less of pleasantness in making a beginning, even though it be a second beginning rendered necessary by past failure; and Raymond felt something of the freshness of youthful hope revive in his spirit as he contemplated the new career that awaited him. After all, it was a career worth living for, barren indeed of all prospect of domestic love and companionship—he would never run the risk of being deceived by another Minna—but offering the two things which are found to support a man best in the absence of these, hard work and an object of honorable ambition.

In this comparatively cheerful mood, he arrived at St. Austin's late in the afternoon—the afternoon of the day of his father's death; but he never suspected that. On leaving the railway station he did not at once turn his steps toward home, but toward an establishment situated in the busiest part of the town, called "The St. Austin's Dining and Reading Rooms"—a place much frequented at this hour of the day by men of business just released from their labors, and, among others, as Raymond knew, by the person with whom he now wished to transact a very important affair. His acceptance of the contract which he had just succeeded in securing made it necessary for him to obtain the immediate command of money for the purpose of reopening his works. The person whom he now wished to see was the same with whom he had negotiated the loan of which he had told Joe Pullyn the other evening, and his object was to ask that the promised sum might be forthcoming without delay.

He had some little way to go to reach the place of his destination, but it was a fine day, and he found a brisk walk after his long journey very enjoyable. The only drawback was, that, as his road lay through a quarter chiefly sacred to merchants and merchants' offices, he was met by some three or four business acquaintances going home to dinner, and was as many times put in fear of being waylaid and bored by five minutes of small-talk. But, greatly to his relief, none of them seemed to-day to be more in the mood for conversation than he was himself, and each and all passed on with no other sign of recognition than

a hurried bow. He might have been a little surprised perhaps if he had thought about it, for one or two of those who thus passed him were notorious button-holders; but he had more interesting subjects of speculation to engross him, and paid no attention to so trivial an incident.

The institution bearing the comparatively humble style of "The St. Austin's Dining and Reading Rooms" was not one of the commonplace eating-houses of the gloomy old-fashioned city type, with dull outlook and cramped accommodation fit only for the soulless creatures that city men were formerly supposed to be. This was altogether a very superior establishment, got up and conducted according to the very newest modern notions. The eating was perhaps not so good as it would have been in a place contented to be a mere eating-house; but if the steaks were occasionally slightly tough, and the roast beef not quite so juicy as it might be, there was (*vide* Prospectus of spirited proprietor) a palatial street frontage equal to any of the London clubs, a noble suite of rooms, large, commodious, and airy, and fitted up entirely regardless of expense, and an unlimited supply of journals and periodical literature of all descriptions.

Entering this magnificent establishment, Raymond accosted a proportionately magnificent porter who was loitering about in the hall, or rather vestibule (*vide* Prospectus again), and inquired:

"Is Mr. Shucklebury here to-day?"

The porter was not sure. It was against his rules to be sure of any thing so trivial as the movements of an individual customer; and he passed the question on to a waiter who was just then crossing the hall—none of your scrubby commercial-traveler-looking waiters, but a gentlemanly personage with a white neckcloth and faultlessly fitting dress-coat. The waiter fortunately happened to know that Mr. Shucklebury had just finished dinner and had gone up stairs to the reading-room.

"Perhaps you won't mind stepping up, sir," said the porter grandly. "The glass door that faces you at the top of the first flight."

Raymond passed up the broad stair-case, constructed of the finest imitation marble. He did not look round, or he might have seen that the porter glanced at the waiter and shrugged his shoulders significantly, and that the eyes of both followed him with an expression of more than ordinary curiosity.

At the top of the first flight he found the glass door, and, pushing it open, entered a spacious room, with a row of handsome plate-glass windows facing the street, a long table covered with books and papers, and a variety of easy-chairs respectively adapted to every variety of lounge—the lounge horizontal, the lounge doubled-up, the lounge oscillatory, the lounge American, etc., etc. Some half dozen of these chairs were at present occupied by as many gentlemen reading, or sleeping under pretense of reading, among whom—sitting by one of the windows with a paper in his hand—Raymond at once recognized the person of whom he was in quest.

Mr. Shucklebury was a little man, with a short upright crop of red hair on the way to become gray, small foxy eyes, high cheek-bones, a sharp sagacious-looking nose that seemed to be always on the scent for something, and the thin wiry

frame with which Nature generally couples such a physiognomy. He was always dressed with scrupulous care, in a new black suit that looked solemn enough for a parson or an undertaker, and a spotless white cravat to match. So clerical indeed was his costume, that it not unfrequently happened to him to be taken for a clergyman—a tribute to his appearance which he regarded as the highest compliment that could possibly be paid him. For Mr. Shucklebury's weak point, if so shrewd a person could be said to have a weak point, was a desire that all the world should be impressed with an idea of his perfect, almost excessive respectability. Perhaps one of the reasons of this desire was a lurking consciousness that his position might be provocative of question among worldly-minded people of a carping disposition. He was not a money-lender—Heaven forbid that so ugly a name should ever be applied to him; but it would be rather difficult to say what else he was. He had no particular business, and no particular place for carrying it on; and yet he transacted business nevertheless, and apparently with great advantage to himself. Perhaps he might be called a capitalist unattached, understanding by the phrase a moneyed man always on the lookout for the most profitable investment for his money, and not too particular how the profit is made. But whatever he was in his business, in his private life he was irreproachably respectable, the most regular church-goer in his parish, a zealous subscriber to all local charities, and, as has been seen, an unexceptionable dresser.

He was one of the readers, not of the sleepers—Mr. Shucklebury was never known to sleep at irregular hours—and saw Raymond almost as soon as Raymond saw him. The little man looked slightly surprised, but recovered himself instantly, bowed a solemn bow, and then went on with his paper, apparently with no idea that Raymond could have any business with him. But he soon found out his mistake, for Raymond walked straight up to him, and began, in a low voice so as not to be overheard by any one else in the room—

"Mr. Shucklebury, I have a few words to say to you."

Mr. Shucklebury put down his paper with an air of bland surprise, and listened.

"I find I have immediate occasion for that money you agreed to lend me the other day. I have just accepted a large contract, and must set to work again immediately."

Mr. Shucklebury raised his eyebrows.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Lee," he replied placidly—"very sorry indeed. But I have been thinking over the little matter that we were talking of, and I can not tell you how much I lament to find that it is not quite in my power to give you at this juncture the accommodation you require."

"Not in your power!" repeated Raymond with a start. "What do you mean?"

"It will not be altogether convenient to me, Mr. Lee, at this particular moment."

Raymond turned hot and cold in the same instant. The money promised by Mr. Shucklebury would be absolutely necessary to him in recommending business; and if he did not obtain it, there was an end of all the visions of success in which he had that day been indulging. Nor was this the worst. He would in that case have ac-

cepted a contract which he had no means of performing. But there was a stubborn look in Mr. Shucklebury's smooth impassive face which showed that he really meant what he said. Raymond felt himself losing temper.

"And pray what reason have you to give for conduct so dishonorable?"

"My dear sir!" said Mr. Shucklebury, raising his hand to protest.

"I say it is dishonorable. You promised that the money should be ready when I wanted it, and now you tell me that you are going to break your word. If that is not dishonorable . . ."

"My dear sir!" repeated Mr. Shucklebury, this time in his most soothing tones, for he held his reputation very dear, and was in terrible fear lest the other people in the room should hear this unseemly language applied to him. "You have altogether mistaken my motives, my dear sir, I do assure you. Personally my feelings of esteem and regard, and—affection I might almost say, are as high as ever, higher than ever, if possible. I am sure I only wish I could make you a present of the money as a proof of my sentiments, only you wouldn't allow that, I know. But business is business, you see, and, looking at the matter in the light of an investment, it is impossible not to perceive that its conditions are in some degree changed from what they were the other day. People *will* talk, you know—ah! what a world it is we live in!—and when a man in business once gets talked about, especially a man in a young and struggling business such as unfortunately yours for some little time to come must be—a—a—you understand me, I am sure. But my personal feelings are quite unaltered, and ever will be. A—a— Good-evening, Mr. Lee."

He made a rapid movement toward the door, trusting to Raymond's evident surprise for an opportunity of making his escape unmolested. But Raymond recovered himself in time to intercept the little man before he could carry out his intention.

"Mr. Shucklebury, I insist upon knowing . . ."

"Hush, hush, my dear friend," interrupted Mr. Shucklebury, half authoritatively, half coaxingly, as though dealing with some dangerous lunatic or wild animal; and indeed it was in something of this light that he regarded Raymond at the present moment. "Another time I shall have the pleasure, but just now it is really impossible. I have an engagement—a most important engagement which I had nearly forgotten. Good-evening."

Again Mr. Shucklebury made a movement toward the door, and this time he was allowed to reach it. For Raymond, in the act of following, saw two or three pairs of eyes regarding him inquisitively over the newspapers with which their owners were ostensibly occupied. He did not choose to engage in a public squabble with Mr. Shucklebury; and, turning from the pursuit with an air of as much indifference as he could assume, sat down to the perusal of the first newspaper that came to hand. It happened to be the latest edition of the *St. Austin's Mercury* of that day's date.

He had only taken it up by way of concealing his excitement, and his eyes at first wandered over the columns quite mechanically.

But suddenly they were arrested by a name

the sight of which seemed to make his heart stand still; and his whole attention became awakened. It was well for him that he held the paper before his face, or the expression which gradually settled itself on his features while he read would have betrayed an inner storm far more terrible than that which he had sought to hide when he turned away so indifferently from Mr. Shucklebury. Even as it was, every body in the room observed that the sheet in his hand shook violently, and every body in the room was close enough to form a conclusion as to what he was reading.

He was reading a detailed and highly spiced narrative of the events which had kept St. Austin's in such commotion since yesterday morning, including an account, under the head of "Latest Particulars," of Walter Lee's death (the wretched culprit's mortal agony, the penny-a-liner called it) almost in the presence of the officers of justice come to arrest him.

As he read, his brain reeled with a sensation of despairing horror. So this was why his button-holding acquaintances had passed him on the street! This was why Mr. Shucklebury was afraid of trusting him with a loan! The stain of the old disgrace was renewed with a deeper dye than ever. The whole town was reminded that he was the son of a felon, and of a felon from whom only a timely death had averted a felon's punishment. After all his strivings to redeem the tarnished honor of his name, after the sacrifice of a fortune and the best years of his life to that one object, this was to be the end—that he should suddenly wake and find his shame as fresh as on the morrow of the first discovery of his father's guilt. And Minna too must have heard it all. What had she thought? What could she have thought?

Long after he had read all that there was to read he sat wrapped in these meditations, instinctively holding the paper to his face as a screen, yet seeing nothing before him but a blank, stupefied as one who has just received a crushing blow.

At last, perhaps reminded of the flight of time by the waning day-light, he began to remember that there were other people in the room, and to bethink himself that they must be wondering why he sat there so motionless. The idea of being a subject for their speculations acted as a goad to prick him into exertion, and staggering he rose to his feet. He was conscious that he tottered, and with a new effort steadied himself; then, with the slow precision of an automaton, looking neither to right nor left, and yet somehow aware, without looking, that all present were observing him, stalked out of the room. As he reached the foot of the stairs, the porter and some three or four waiters were hanging about the doorway, but, still without looking to either side, he made his way through them, and reached the open air.

He took the road toward home, from the instinct of habit rather than from any settled intention. The cool evening breeze blowing about his temples did him good physically, and he was no longer conscious of any effort as he walked. But the air did not help him to recover from the mental effects of the shock he had just suffered; he was still stunned and dizzy, and walked like one in a dream, through well-known streets which yet seemed as strangely unfamiliar

as if he had suddenly dropped from another world.

He was not so much stunned, however, but that he was keenly alive to the probability that every body was watching him. He felt as though the very stones in the street were all made of eyes, every one turned in his direction. And yet he did not once see any body look, for the simple reason that he never looked himself. He was conscious of being observed, but only as a blind man may be conscious of a scorching glare of sunshine. He would have given any thing to be able to hide, but he could not; there was no refuge nearer than his own house.

At last there came a lull in the noise of traffic that hummed about his ears, and he was aware that he had fewer eyes to encounter. He had left the bustling quarter of the town behind, and had entered a region of long semi-country roads in gradual process of being made town streets—resounding in the day-time to the clang of builders' tools and the rumble of heavy wagons on their way to and from neighboring warehouses, but at this hour of the evening comparatively quiet. The worst of the ordeal seemed to be over, and he felt slightly relieved.

But the worst was not over yet.

He came within sight presently of a roadside tavern that had been a rustic inn once, but to which the march of civilization had brought a taint of the gin-palace. It was still rustic enough, however, to provide out-door accommodation for its customers, in the shape of half a dozen benches and a couple of rude tables ranged in front of the house; and of these advantages, the weather this evening being warm and tempting, some score of carousers were at present availing themselves. They were evidently a rough set, and were laughing and singing rather uproariously as Raymond approached; but for that very reason it was probable that they would have no attention to spare for a solitary passer-by, and he held on his way with a sense of comparative security.

Suddenly, as he was passing in front of the house, the noise of laughing and singing ceased. In another moment a woman stepped forward from the group, and placed herself directly in Raymond's path.

"Aha! Mr. Lee, so we've found you out at last, have we?"

He was obliged to look up, and saw himself confronted by a virago of a woman, with a red bloated face, and arms set defiantly akimbo. He could not remember at first where he had seen her, but presently he recognized her as the wife of a former workman of his—a drunken worthless fellow, who had been under notice of dismissal at the time of the fire, but who notwithstanding had taken it into his head to consider himself aggrieved because he had received a smaller share of compensation than his comrades. This woman had come begging to Raymond more than once, but now he had fallen so low that she considered herself at liberty to insult him.

He came to a momentary pause, and his antagonist took advantage of it to scream out with tipsy vehemence—

"Yes, we've found you out at last, and no mistake. We all know now why you couldn't afford to pay honest folks their due—you had something else to do with your money, I warrant."

Raymond made no answer, but stepped aside

and passed rapidly on. She did not follow, for by following she would have lost her public-house audience; but, enraged at his seeming impassability, exclaimed at the top of her voice—

"Do you see? He's got nothing to say for himself—do you see? That's the grand gentleman who cheats poor burned-out working-men—there he goes. A fine fellow indeed! Why, if the truth were known, I shouldn't wonder but what he burned down the place himself."

At which sally the delighted auditors, most of them pretty far gone, burst into a loud rollicking guffaw.

Outwardly Raymond made no sign, but not the less did he hear the taunt and the laugh which it called forth, and not the less did they rankle in his soul. Long after the merriment had died away, its echoes continued to ring in his ears, making his proud spirit writhe with pain and mortification. If he had been less crushed than he was, he might have had more moral strength than to let himself be thus affected by an affront coming from such a quarter; but as things were, his very contempt for the authors of the insult made him feel the insult itself more keenly. To be jeered at in the streets by the drunken customers of a pothouse seemed to him, in his present sensitive mood, to mark the level of his degradation.

With the sounds of drunken laughter still buzzing in his brain, he reached home, hardly knowing how; and, rejecting all offers of refreshment prompted by the good-nature, or perhaps by the curiosity, of his housekeeper, made his way to his study.

At last he was alone. But the solitude he had so longed for seemed to do him no good now that he had obtained it. It only set him free to yield to the feelings of shame and despair with which, for the sake of appearances, he had hitherto endeavored to struggle. And he did yield. He sat down by his table, and, pushing from him with an expression of disgust a bundle of papers which had furnished him with data in his sanguine labors of the other evening, leaned his chin upon his hand, and stared vacantly at the bit of darkening sky visible through the narrow window. It was the attitude and expression of a man who feels himself absolutely without hope.

For so it was with Raymond now. Hope seemed to have been crushed and annihilated out of him by this last blow. He had tried hard to carry on the game of life, undiscouraged by heavy odds, but at length he found himself definitively beaten. He had done battle with disappointment after disappointment as a brave man should, but now the very means of fighting were taken away from him. It was no use struggling longer. Ruin and dishonor, the contempt of Minna and of every body else, were his proper lot, and he must accept them. There was no place left for him in the world; how should there be when the world was made up of such people as Minna and Mr. Shucklebury and yonder drunken merry-makers—people who reserved their favors for the winners and were all eager in their respective ways to mark their reprobation of the losers? He had no place left.

So at least it seemed to him, for he had reached the point at which even the instinct of self-help is overborne. The sense of present despair was too absorbing to leave energy for devising

plans for the future. His activity of brain was benumbed and paralyzed; all his faculties except that of memory seemed to be in a state of collapse; and as he sat brooding over the events which had borne their final fruit that day, his mind was almost a blank for every thing else.

Thus he hardly raised his eyes when his housekeeper, again actuated by good-nature or curiosity, brought in his lamp with the remark that he had been so long in ringing for it that she was afraid of finding he had been taken ill. He thanked her, and said that he was quite well; but the reply was merely mechanical, for even while he was making it he was scarcely aware of the woman's presence, and sat gazing into vacancy as before. In the same way, a few minutes after she had left him, his ears heard a ring at the garden gate, followed presently by a parley in the hall; but though his ears heard, he might be said to be almost unconscious of the sounds.

The parley in the hall ceased—if Raymond had been listening, he might have detected something like the chink of silver—and immediately afterward there came a low tap at the door of the room where he sat. He heard it, but took no notice, simply because he failed to connect it with the idea of any body waiting to be admitted.

A minute's pause, and the tap was repeated.

This time Raymond heard with a vague feeling of annoyance at the disturbance, and answered, still, however, without looking round—

"Come in."

The door was opened.

He knew it was opened because he heard the handle turn and the hinges creak, but after that came another pause.

From the force of habit he had expected a footstep or a voice, and was sufficiently aroused from his lethargy to be surprised at the silence.

"Who is there?" he asked, and as he spoke he looked round.

But, once having turned his eyes toward the door, he could not withdraw them again, and continued gazing with dilated pupils as though he saw a vision; and so indeed he thought that he did.

For in the doorway stood a beaming figure of brightness and beauty—a figure like Minna's.

CHAPTER LI.

MINNA'S PENANCE.

SHE stood there as radiant and sunny as ever—a very embodiment of light. Her eyes drooped a little as his confronted them, but through the downcast lashes might be divined the soft glimmer of a dawning smile. Her lips were half parted too, as if in readiness to speak, though as yet they moved not. The apparition was as that of some life-like figure in a picture, waiting for a signal to start forth from the canvas and become living in very truth.

But the expected signal was not given. Raymond was too much startled by the vision which had thus burst upon him to be able to speak a word, and could only sit contemplating it in mute wonderment, hardly knowing if it were real or not.

For some seconds she stood waiting to be accosted. Then, finding that she waited in vain,

she made two or three steps forward which brought her close to his side, and murmured with eyelids still cast down—

"Raymond!"

The voice was Minna's voice, and he knew that his eyes had not deceived him. But the discovery that this bright appearance was real flesh and blood made it more of a riddle to him than ever. Surely she had not come to mock him in his disgrace! and yet what else could have brought her to his house that evening?

He could not speak at first, but presently succeeded in articulating—

"What have you come for?"

She raised her eyes for a moment with an appealing look, as though entreating him to spare her; but seeing from his perplexed face that the question was really asked in good faith, lowered them again, and answered blushing—

"You are in great trouble. I have come to ask if you will let me comfort you."

But he understood as little as ever, and only sat looking at her blankly, doubting his ears as well as his eyes. Minna came to comfort him! What could that mean?

She tried to explain herself, but stumbled over her words sadly.

"You once said that we—at least that you—if I . . . I mean you once said that I might be of some use in—in helping you to surmount a great misfortune that had just then happened to you. And—and what I have come to say now is that—that if you have not changed your mind, I shall be quite willing—that is, I have no objection . . . That is, I mean—I mean, that, if you wish it, we will try."

The explanation had not been very lucid, and it is not wonderful that Raymond, with all his senses in a state of partial paralysis, did not in the least comprehend what was meant by it.

Minna was in great distress. She perceived that she had no chance of being understood while she spoke so vaguely, and yet the sight of Raymond's haggard features and bewildered air made her tremble for the effect of keeping him longer in suspense. What should she do? She looked again into his pale face, and pity decided the question. It was her penance that she must speak plainly; and was not a penance of some sort merited?

"Raymond," she whispered, and as she spoke the blood rushed into her cheeks, and her limbs trembled under her. "Raymond, you said once that you loved me. If you do not despise me too much, will you take me back to your love again?"

She was understood now; or rather her words were understood, for apparently she herself remained as insoluble an enigma as before. Scarcely had she done speaking when she felt her wrist grasped by a strong hand, and found Raymond's eyes gazing eagerly into hers, as though to read her heart in them. But almost immediately he let her wrist go, and, shaking his head, fixed his eyes moodily on the ground.

"I am poor."

"And will you not let me have the privilege of helping to make you rich? Oh! Raymond."

But still he shook his head, and went on sternly—

"Poor and dishonored too. Have you not heard of what has happened since yesterday morning?"

"Yes, and it is because I have heard that I am here,"

He glanced up in astonishment at the words. There she was in all her bright beauty, standing before him with downcast eyes and folded hands, as a self-accused criminal in the presence of the judge. A momentary tide of tenderness rose in his heart, and for an instant he felt an impulse to throw himself at her feet.

But it was for an instant only. Her love had been tried and found wanting, and he did not choose to be indebted to her compassion or remorse. Her compassion! As this explanation of her conduct occurred to him, his heart grew harder against her than ever. What! because it suited her feminine caprice to play the penitent, were his wounds to be thus probed and torn open in order that she might be restored to good terms with herself?

"You have a conscience, I see, but do not fear that I will take advantage of it. You are free, and it is right that you should be free. You promised once to be my wife, but you did not promise to marry a ruined man."

"It makes no difference to me whether you are ruined or not. And it never has made a difference, though you wronged me enough to think otherwise."

This time she spoke with a sorrowful dignity which suggested reproach rather than penitence. He could hardly believe that he had heard aright, and looked up again. Her eyes were gently reproachful as well as her voice.

"Oh! Raymond, how you wronged me! I deserved to be hardly judged, I know, but surely not so hardly as that. What! to think that it was only your money that I cared for!"

Imperceptibly the relations of the two had undergone a complete change since the commencement of their dialogue. The criminal was no longer Minna, but Raymond, and he began to feel guilty as a criminal should. Minna perceived her advantage, and pressed it.

"I told you at the time that I had another reason than the base one you suspected, but you would not believe me then. If I tell you so again, will you believe me now?"

He was more than half conquered by this time, as his reply, if he had been allowed to make one, would probably have betrayed. But before he could speak he was interrupted by a man's voice exclaiming—

"You must believe her, for it is true, and I am her witness."

And with these words a man entered the room whom Raymond at once recognized as John Haroldson.

The farmer had accompanied his daughter to Raymond's house, intending, however, not to make his appearance till the lovers should have come to an understanding; but, finding the process so long, he had lost patience, and determined to take matters in hand himself.

"Look here, Mr. Lee, the long and short of it is, she's an angel, and I'm a hot-headed fool, and have been all my life through. When first she heard you had lost your money, she was set on writing to say that she loved you better than ever; and she would have done it too, only I told her something that made her think, as I did myself, that a marriage between you two would be a sin. What that something was I'll tell you

afterward, but it is a long story ; and all you have got to do now is to believe what she says, that it was you she cared about and not your money. Money indeed ! it's not likely she was so fond of money when she got Joe to ask you to take all she had."

Raymond's understanding was suddenly illuminated, and his heart as well. He turned toward Minna ; her eyes were veiled by a pair of quivering lids, but in the conscious glow which rose to her brow he read that what he had taken as a proof of Joe's friendship had been in reality a proof of Minna's love.

"What ! was it you ?" he stammered.

She raised her soft eyes, no longer reproachful or penitent, but only loving.

"Will you believe me now, Raymond ?"

He did not answer by words, for he could not speak, but drew her to his heart and held her there.

CHAPTER LII.

OLD SHOES.

ONE fine morning, a very few weeks after Raymond had received this unexpected visit, there was unwonted excitement among the usually quiet villagers of Hollsworth, the principal symptom being a determination of population to the old parish church.

So marked was this tendency that, the day not being a Sunday, any intelligent stranger with a spark of curiosity in his composition would certainly have been sufficiently struck by it to inquire what was going forward. And if the intelligent stranger had put the question, he would have been answered by an equally intelligent native, that the occasion of the phenomenon was a double marriage which was being solemnized within the venerable edifice that day, the brides being two sisters belonging to the neighborhood.

The brides were Minna and Amy Haroldson, and a beautiful pair of brides they made.

After this, need it be said who the bridegrooms were ?

There was a little pomp and circumstance of course, but not much, the extraordinary interest manifested by the good people of Hollsworth being rather due to their personal knowledge of the two heroines of the day than to any special splendor of bridal paraphernalia. Any thing extraordinarily elaborate in this line would obviously have been out of keeping with a wedding-breakfast at Black Moor Farm, and both the brides were too loyal to their old home to think of the wedding-breakfast being held anywhere else. But whatever the occasion may have lacked in magnificence was more than made up to it in happiness. Surely never was there more joyous feast than that wedding-breakfast, with John Haroldson at the top of the table and Captain Pullyn at the bottom, and at either hand a brightly blushing bride and proudly admiring bridegroom.

"The sight of them is like four sunbeams, each going straight to my heart," remarked the captain, who was the principal spokesman of the day. He had to do his own share of speaking and John Haroldson's too, the rhetorical efforts of the latter being impeded by an awkward choking sensation in his throat. "Yes, each going

to my heart, especially the young ladies, and I hope the bridegrooms won't run foul of me for saying so. And there's another thing I'll say of them, the young ladies I mean, and that is, if I thought there were two other such rosebuds left in the world, I'd try to tackle one of 'em for myself ; but as I know there ain't, I s'pose I may as well steer clear of the trouble. And there's another thing still I've got to say, and that is, Here's a health and a blessing to the two good ships we've seen launched this day—the *Raymond and Minnie*, and the *Joe and Amy*. May their course be fair and prosperous ; and what's more, I don't doubt that it will be, for they've got wind and tide in their favor, and though there were a few clouds in the offing that looked ugly at one time, it's all clear now, and they're in for a spell of fair weather as sure as my name's Pullyn. And by the way, I might say as sure as Amy's name is Pullyn too, only I couldn't wish to see her blushing prettier than she is already, so I'll leave that where it is, and beg to conclude with the sentiment, Here's a merry voyage to the pair of crafts, and may every thing turn out for them as well as it promises, for better than that I can't wish 'em."

A toast which was drunk with three times three, and supplemented on the departure of the happy couples by a hurricane of old shoes.

Captain Pullyn had not exaggerated the brightness of the auspices under which the two marriages had been celebrated. In the case of Raymond and Minna, it is true, an uphill battle remained to be fought by the newly made husband before he could hope fully to recover the position he had formerly held, and which he had set his heart on reconquering for his young wife's sake. But already the conditions of the battle were wonderfully smoothed, and success looked much nearer than a few weeks ago he could have deemed possible. Thanks to that half of Minna's fortune which at her earnest entreaty he consented to use, his works were already reopened and in full activity. At the same time, the gossip which had been set going by his father's reappearance, and which at first threatened to do him so much injury, was gradually dying out.

For gossip always must sooner or later die out when no fresh nutriment can be found for it, and in this case there was no fresh nutriment by any possibility obtainable. Walter Lee's career was ended by death. Emma Underwood, having already done her worst, could do no more ; and immediately on her release from custody (for the charge against her had broken down in consequence of her accuser's death), she had disappeared from the town, never to be seen or heard of in its neighborhood again.

And then, just when the scandal about Walter Lee was beginning to lose its first novelty, there came a rumor that Raymond was going to be married, and moreover that his betrothed was a young lady of some property. Not only did these tidings give the gossips something new to talk about, but they suggested that since there were at least two persons in the world, Raymond himself and his intended, who did not regard his case as desperate, it might possibly not be desperate after all. The next time he met one of his button-holding acquaintances, he was seized upon and congratulated.

So that in his sanguine predictions at the wed-

ding-breakfast Captain Pullyn had really something to go upon.

Years passed, and those predictions were fully verified by the result.

Raymond and Minna had determined that together they would conquer, and they did conquer. If it were said of Raymond now, as Mr. Fanshawe had said of him once so greatly to Minna's contentment, that he was the richest man in St. Austin's, the statement would savor far less of exaggeration than it did then. And as he gradually achieved material prosperity, he had the satisfaction of finding that he was regaining social status. Again people began to forget what his father had been; again the magnates of St. Austin's began to think Mr. Lee's company worth cultivating, and to invite him to enter their houses accordingly. Nor were those overtures uniformly refused, as they had been in the dreary old times when he had no beautiful young wife to accompany him. Mr. and Mrs. Lee were too happy in their own home to care for leaving it often; but neither did they think it right to eschew society altogether only because it is faulty and imperfect like the universal human nature of which it is an epitome. Minna had cured Raymond of his misanthropy, as he had cured her of an undue worship of conventionalities.

It is always pleasant to succeed, and Raymond was undeniably glad to attain the wealth and position he had been working for. But it must not be supposed that meantime his home life had been such as to make it possible for wealth and position to bring him any great increase of felicity. On the contrary, he and his wife had been so perfectly happy in their domestic relations during those years of struggle that, but for the pleasure of feeling that they were conquering, they would have been totally indifferent to external opinion and to the business of getting rich.

They had so much to care for and take delight in—so many objects of interest besides the color of the new carriage or the enrollment of a fresh name on their visiting list. First of course were their children, and these were infinitely more interesting than any thing else that could be named in the same breath. And in addition to their own, there were Joe's and Amy's children, on whom they were expected to bestow any unappropriated surplus of tenderness. For Joe and Amy lived very near them, and the families kept up a close and constant intercourse which materially enhanced the happiness of both. And then, perpetually oscillating between the two houses, were a couple of old gentlemen without whom the family gatherings were never complete—hale, hearty old gentlemen both, in spite of the great age which one of them had now attained. Which of these was the greatest favorite with the children it would be hard to say. Grandpapa Pullyn—so he was called in Raymond's household as well as Joe's—was far away the most ingenious at toy-making, turning off the sweetest little ships by the dozen. It was to be said, however, for Grandpapa Haroldson that, though afflicted with clumsiness, he manifestly yielded to nobody in the goodness of his intentions, and was perhaps the one who stood the greatest amount of pulling about without remonstrance. There was indeed only a single point on which Grandpapa Haroldson was rather strict. He invariably had a gentle expostulation ready for any symptom of a disposition to quar-

rel—it was such a dreadful thing to be passionate, he always said. But then he was himself such a remarkably even-tempered mild old gentleman that the little folks instinctively felt he had a right to his idiosyncrasy.

When Raymond and Minna had reached that stage of prosperity marked by the setting up of a carriage and pair, another event occurred which at once multiplied tenfold Minna's pleasure on the occasion.

This was a proffer of "forgiveness" from Mrs. Fanshawe—now a rich widow, and not exempted by her riches from the *ennui* of her solitary state. No objectionable condition being attached to this overture, it was eagerly accepted, and a meeting was arranged and effected which resulted in a reconciliation as perfect as the circumstances admitted. For Mrs. Fanshawe did not forgive her niece in the sense of ceasing to condemn the past, or thinking that Minna had by any possibility acted well and wisely in jilting a peer of the realm. Even after Lord Fitz-John had been separated, under circumstances of some scandal, from the lady whom he eventually married (one of the rich Miss Newtons whom his mother wished him to choose from), even after he had sought a permanent retreat in a third-rate Continental watering-place, leaving the estate to go once more into nursing—even then it is doubtful whether Mrs. Fanshawe regarded Minna's desertion of him as any thing less than an offense against moral obligations and social order. Still she was willing, if not literally to forgive the past, at least to forget it in consideration of the extreme respectability of the present.

So they were reconciled, and the reconciliation removed the only cause of regret that had followed Minna into her new life. Minna was naturally affectionate, and though, as she now knew, she had never loved her aunt with any thing like the love which she would have been capable of feeling for her real mother, it had made her uncomfortable to be estranged from one under whose roof she had so long lived. But unfeignedly happy though she was in the restoration, or partial restoration, of Mrs. Fanshawe's favor, she never again called that lady by any other than the appellation expressing their actual relationship. It was always "aunt" or "dear aunt," but never "mamma" or "mother." Minna was a mother herself now, and had learned that a mother's rights are sacred.

Perhaps it was this omission which, rankling in Mrs. Fanshawe's mind, assisted her appreciation of the merits of her other niece. Or perhaps her attention was favorably drawn to that other niece simply by the fact that Amy was the wife of a rich man who was on the way to become richer still; for, partly by dint of hard labor, partly perhaps by dint of his prestige as an heiress's husband, Joe had by this time risen to be a partner in the firm he had so long served. However this may have been, certain it is that Mrs. Fanshawe, happening to meet Amy at a dinner-party given by Mr. and Mrs. Lee on the occasion of the reconciliation, mentally pronounced her really quite a genteel young person considering her disadvantages. This approving judgment ultimately ripened into a decided predilection, a predilection which still continues, and is likely to continue, in full force. It is true that

Minna remains on perfectly friendly terms with her aunt ; but Amy, without wishing it, and almost without knowing it, is evidently the favorite. The opinion of the best qualified observers is that when the time comes for opening Mrs. Fanshawe's will, she will be found to have made a tripartite division of her fortune between her two nieces and the Society for the Conversion of Old-Clothesmen in the Metropolis — Minna's share to be probably the smallest.

But Minna does not trouble her head about this.

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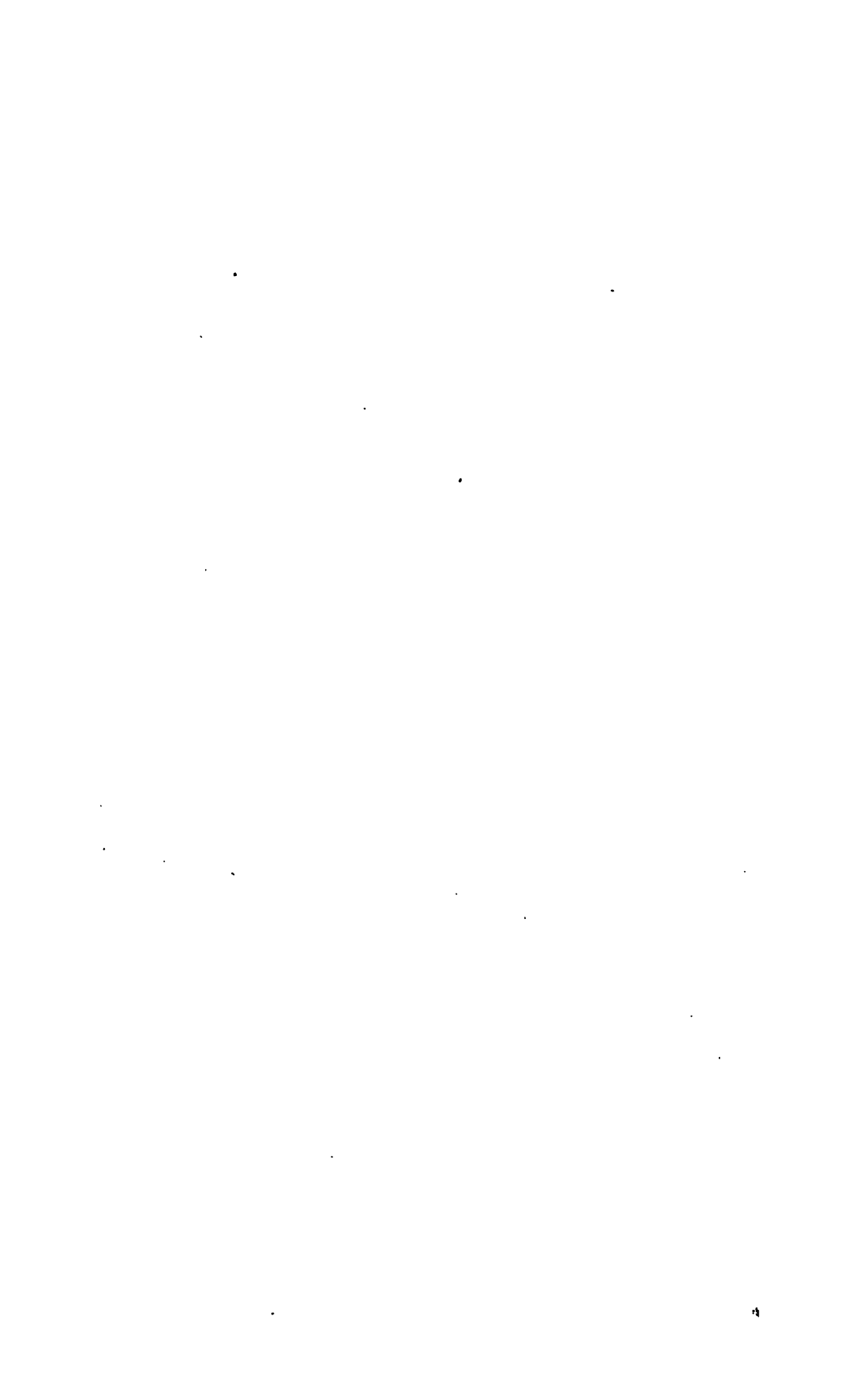
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